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Placemaking in the Post-Functionalist and Post-Digital City: the Case Study of Ziferblat

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology

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List of abbreviations

CEO: Chief Executive Officer

CIS: The Commonwealth of Independent States; an alliance of former Soviet republics, including: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan

CMO: Chief Marketing Officer

COO: Chief Operating Officer

CTO: Chief Technology Officer

DIY: Do It Yourself

ICT: Information and Communications Technology

PPS: Project for Public Spaces

ZLHG: Ziferblat London Hosting Guide

ZUKI: Ziferblat UK & Ireland

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Declaration

I confirm that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

Initial formulations of some ideas contained in this thesis have previously appeared in the following talks, conference presentations and publications:

Home, work and leisure in the post-functionalist city: the case study of anti-cafes. Guest lecture for the Masters level module. University of Warwick, November 2017.

Social network in real life: anti-cafe as a new form of urban public space. Guest talk at the Media & Communication Department. Södertörn University, April 2017.

It takes two to wash dishes: community building in anti-cafes. Warwick Sociology doctoral conference, June 2017.

Anti-cafe, pay-per-minute cafe, or post-cafe? A new type of urban public space in Russia and the UK. BSA annual conference. Aston University, April 2016.

Kviat, A. (2014). Kafe bez edy, fastfud kak media, vremennyj park: postvirtualnost i gorod 3.0 v Rossii (Anti-cafes, Fast Food as a Media, and Pop-up Parks: The Postvirtual city in Russia). *Journal of Volgograd State University. Philosophy, Sociology and Social Technologies*, 3(23), 126–136.

Abstract

This thesis explores a new form of urban public place—multifunctional venues called ‘pay-per-minute cafes’, ‘public living rooms’, or ‘anti-cafes’. Charged by the minute and provided with free wifi and access to kitchen facilities, visitors of such spaces are entitled to use them however they like, as they are designed to accommodate various social, cultural, home-from-home and work activities. The first venue of this kind, Ziferblat, opened in 2011 in Moscow as a social experiment seeking to build ‘social media in real life’, turn customers into participants and overcome the limitations of the functionalist urban planning separating home, work and leisure from each other. In the next couple of years, Ziferblat’s look-alikes have spread overseas to Europe, Asia and North America; meanwhile, Ziferblat itself has developed into an international franchise with 18 branches, five of which are located in the UK.

Using this phenomenon as a lens on two emerging urban trends—the post-functionalist city and the post-digital city—this thesis investigates the ‘who’, ‘why’, and ‘how’ of placemaking in the context of current debates on sociability, diversity and social inclusion in the urban public space, participatory culture and sharing economy, and neoliberal urban policy. This critical case study, drawing on large-scale media analysis, 48 qualitative interviews and over 160 hours of ethnography conducted in four Ziferblat branches in Moscow, London and Manchester, employs an interdisciplinary theoretical framework, combining urban sociology, human geography, cultural anthropology, media studies, and consumer and service research to examine the intricate connections and contradictions between the social and the spatial, the global and the local, the social and the commercial, the public and the private, the physical and the digital. The research findings are of potential interest to academics, practitioners, social activists, urban planners and policymakers dealing with the issues of placemaking and community building in the city.

INTRODUCTION

In January 2014, major media outlets across the world—BBC, CNN, Forbes, The Guardian, The Independent, Evening Standard, Huffington Post, Business Insider, Telegraph, Daily Mail, Spiegel—reported on London's new hot spot called *Ziferblat* (the Russian for 'clockface'). This place was the UK's first branch of a Russian chain of multifunctional venues providing free wifi and refreshments and charging customers by the minute, in return letting them use the space however they like. Alexi Duggins, the first reporter to visit *Ziferblat* in London, struggled to categorise it, despite falling in love with the place:

THE BEST THINGS IN LIFE ARE 3P: LONDON'S FIRST PAY-PER-MINUTE CAFE

'Help yourself to coffee and biscuits!' says Ziferblat's impossibly smiley hostess, as she opens a kitchen cupboard. 'Or I think we've got peanut butter and toast. Oh, and onions...'

On heading to the UK's first branch of this Russian chain of pay-per-minute hangouts, I had a simple plan: take the cost of a medium Americano in the nearest coffee chain (£2.25), spend enough time in Shoreditch's Ziferblat to run up the same bill (an hour and 15 minutes at 3p per minute) and look at the value for money of both. But it soon becomes obvious that you just can't compare this to a normal cafe. I'm led to a kitchen, told to consider the place a 'social space you treat like your home', shown how to use the espresso machine and urged to bring in a meal or make one using the food in the cupboards (hence the onions).

People wander about, helping themselves to drinks, two students pore over books and on one table there's evidence of flower arranging. As a record player softly pumps out Motown and fairy lights twinkle from the walls, it feels like a relaxed common room. But you don't get many common rooms decked out in such an impeccable selection of cool retro furniture: it's part living room, part vintage homeware store, a lovely place to hang out without pressure to buy stuff. We may only be a week into 2014, but this has to be a contender for best opening of the year. If not, I'll eat those onions. Raw.

(Duggins, 2014)

Although the term 'pay-per-minute cafe' immediately stuck to *Ziferblat* in English-language media, the owner, a 29-year-old entrepreneur Ivan Mitin, insisted that his invention had nothing to do with cafes. Instead, he presented *Ziferblat* as 'a social experiment rather than a business' (direct quote in: Peters, 2014) and 'social media in real life', drawing on such principles of digital culture as participation, openness and non-hierarchy, but at the same time encouraging people to make new connections in the 'real', offline realm (interview in: Reid, 2014). He also explained that *Ziferblat*'s self-service system and pay-by-the-minute model were supposed to empower customers, turning them into participants (*'Nobody serves you—you help yourself. By paying for*

time, you participate in the existence of this space, it's like we all rent [it] together)¹ and providing them with greater flexibility of use (*'Here (...) you can work, collaborate, make art, read a book, get acquainted with good people, attend events—in other words, do whatever you like as long as you respect the space and the other people in it'*).² Another key idea behind Ziferblat was building a metaphorical 'treehouse' together with the guests to hide away from the 'stupid rules of society' (Mitin's interview in: Reid, 2014).

The history of this ambitious placemaking project started in 2010 in Moscow, when Mitin—then a blogger and social activist—was looking for a place where he could meet up with the members of his small-scale movement called *Stikhi v Karmane* ('Pocket Poetry'). This group, leafletting DIY paper cards with classic Russian poetry around the city, would meet every other week in a cafe to craft cards and have a chat. Dissatisfied with overpricing, intolerance to lingering and everlasting pressure to purchase food and drinks, Mitin rented a little (50 sq.mt.) attic in a residential building and made it a publicly accessible shared space, funded through pay-what-you-want donations. In this venue, called *Dom na Dereve* ('Treehouse') and framed as a 'public living room', visitors were invited to *'drink as much tea or coffee as [they] want', 'help [themselves] and treat others to food [they] bring to share', 'chill, work, study, create, make friends'* and *'linger as long as [they] please'* (Mitin, 2010f).

After a year, Treehouse became too overcrowded, and in September 2011 Mitin opened Ziferblat in Moscow—a bigger venue with a more, as he put it, 'formalised' financial system (Mitin, 2012c). Whereas in Treehouse it was often unclear for newcomers how much money they should put into the donation box, in Ziferblat they had to pay for the time spent in the venue, getting everything else—tea, coffee, biscuits, wifi, and, most importantly, space—for free. The ideology, however, was similar to that of Treehouse: social and cultural functions of the public place were prioritised over consumption and customers were supposed to become active participants in the process of placemaking and community building. Furthermore, it was emphasised that Ziferblat is neither a cafe (despite having a professional coffee machine), nor a coworking space (despite welcoming people with laptops), nor a cultural centre (despite hosting various cultural events), nor a home (despite drawing on the same idea of a 'public living room', as in Treehouse), but a mixture of all these. With multifunctionality came the challenge of categorisation. Assertively rejecting the 'cafe' label, Mitin came up with the term *svobodnoye prostranstvo*, which can be most accurately translated as 'a loose space', i.e. a space that does not belong to any

¹ Mitin's direct quote in: Allen, 2014.

² Project description in: Kickstarter, 2014.

specific category and therefore cannot be constrained by any rules or functional limitations.

In just a few months after Ziferblat's opening, similar venues started to emerge in Moscow and other cities across Russia, followed by other CIS countries (Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Latvia, etc.). Some of them called themselves 'time cafes', 'time clubs', 'non-cafes', 'smart cafes', 'open spaces', or 'creative spaces', but the most common designation was 'anti-cafe'. However, the owners of such places repeatedly emphasised that this term should not be misinterpreted as an intention to rebel against cafes or compete with them, as their offer was quite different (Shakleina, 2012). Unsurprisingly, the fiercest critic of the term 'anti-cafe' was Mitin, though it was not only the word itself that he was unhappy with. The rapid growth of the anti-cafe market attracted those who were driven first and foremost by profit; thus, a typical 2012–2013 publication on that topic in Russian media would be entitled '*How to make money on free tea and biscuits*' (see, e.g., Cherkudinova, 2012; Krasnova, 2013). Notably, almost all major anti-cafe operators in Moscow started off with approaching Ziferblat with franchise proposals but got turned down by Mitin as '*too commercially-oriented*' (Mitin, 2012c).

Meanwhile, his own business has been growing: by 2013, Ziferblat had developed into a chain with a dozen branches in Russia and Ukraine. Ziferblat's opening in London and the subsequent media buzz caught the interest of a Manchester-based company *Shenton Group*, operating a number of hospitality, real estate, venture capital and agriculture businesses. In 2014, Shenton Group bought Ziferblat's master franchise for the UK and Ireland and in two years opened four new branches in Manchester and Liverpool, with plans to launch a venue in every major UK city by 2021 (Begum, 2016). By 2017, Ziferblat had eighteen branches, including nine in Russia (Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Nizhny Novgorod, Kazan, Rostov-on-Don, Dvoryaninovo), two in Ukraine (Kyiv, Kharkiv), one in Slovenia (Ljubljana), one in Mongolia (Ulaanbaatar), and five in the UK (London, Manchester, Liverpool). To this day, it remains the only Russian anti-cafe that expanded outside CIS countries.

As of now, it can be said without hesitation that Mitin's initiative gave birth to a new type of public place with a global geography. Although most of the world's anti-cafes, according to my mapping, are located in CIS countries (Russia alone had 1,300 venues of that kind by the end of 2017), there are about forty³ non-Ziferblat anti-cafes

³ This is a rather conservative estimate, as a more precise mapping is complicated by the variability of category names used by such places. Even when narrowed down to 'anti-cafe', 'time-cafe' and 'pay-per-minute cafe', search terms cannot be figured out immediately because of translation issues (e.g., the Czech term for 'anti-cafe' is *antikavárna*, the German term for 'time cafe' is *Zeitcafe*, and so on).

currently operating in Austria, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, India, Israel, Italy, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Singapore, Spain, Turkey, and Vietnam. While some of them were opened by CIS expats who may have previously visited other anti-cafes in their home countries, many places were founded by the locals whose aspirations were largely shaped by what they read in the media publications covering Ziferblat's opening in the UK (see, e.g., Strauß, 2017; Tay, 2017).

Even though most of these publications discussed Mitin's idea as yet another variation of 'quirky cafes' (like the UK's cereal cafes or Japanese animal cafes where one can enjoy the company of cats, dogs, hedgehogs, owls, or even penguins), some authors interpreted it as a manifestation of wider social trends, such as the rise of remote working culture (Baker, 2014), participatory and DIY movements in the food industry (Pantzar, 2013), the transformation of the idea of home (Tietz, 2017), and the lack of social interaction and community in the digitised city (Cassidy, 2017). However, very little (if any) attempt has yet been made to approach the phenomenon of anti-cafes as an object of social research. The very few exceptions discuss anti-cafes as an essential element of Russian provincial youth culture (Babayan et al., 2014), a post-digital placemaking initiative, restoring the value of unmediated interaction in a mediated public place (Kviat, 2014a: 129), and an example of the new forms of solidarity emerging in late-modern youth cultures (Martínez, 2015: 24).

This thesis aims to address this gap, focusing on Ziferblat as the world's first anti-cafe and, subsequently, the world's first and largest anti-cafe chain. By doing so, it does not attempt to provide a comprehensive analysis of the anti-cafe culture. Instead, I am looking at Ziferblat as a paradigmatic but at the same time extreme case of the anti-cafe (Flyvbjerg, 2006) and, speaking more widely, an object of an interpretative (Geertz, 1983; Thompson and Arsel, 2004), global-ethnographic (Gille and Ó Riain, 2002) case study of placemaking in a specific social and cultural context.

Notwithstanding the fact that Mitin's project was a pioneering prototype for a whole new category of public places, it is in many regards more ambitious and controversial than any other anti-cafe. Even a quick glance at Ziferblat's history, briefly outlined above, demonstrates that it is imbued with many tensions and ambiguities, such as the social vs. the commercial, the global vs. the local, the online vs. the offline, the imaginary vs. the real, the public vs. the private. Not only does the case study of Ziferblat aim to shed light on an under-investigated phenomenon of anti-cafes, but it also seeks to contribute to wider debates on placemaking and social life in the urban public realm, and serve as a lens on two emerging urban trends—the post-functionalist city, where the boundaries between urban functions are increasingly blurred (Di Marino and Lapintie, 2017), and

the post-digital city, permeated with digital technologies and practices but preserving unmediated sociability (Gumpert and Drucker, 2005; Kviat, 2014a).

Drawing on large-scale media analysis, over 160 hours of multi-site ethnography and 48 qualitative interviews conducted in four Ziferblat branches in Moscow, London and Manchester, I attempt to answer the following research questions:

1. Why did such an initiative emerge in Russia and what made it popular in a global context? How is the global/local dialectic negotiated within Ziferblat franchise? I argue that Ziferblat is a glocal phenomenon, originating from very specific historical and cultural circumstances but at the same time reflecting and embodying some global urban trends (participatory and DIY culture, post-digital culture, post-functionalist trend). The glocal nature of this project also manifests itself in the differences and similarities between Moscow, London and Manchester branches.

2. How was the idea of Ziferblat constructed and what is the ultimate goal of this placemaking project? I argue that this public place type was not created from scratch—instead, it builds on a range of socio-spatial metaphors and historical and contemporary forms of public places, all of which carry specific and not always complementary power dynamics, modes of use and codes of conduct. Overall, Ziferblat was designed as an experimental space, producing sociability, community, and participatory culture as a breeding ground for further developments in society, economy and politics.

3. Who are the key agents of placemaking in Ziferblat and what are the power relations between them? How do the social and the spatial interplay in the process of making Ziferblat? I argue that, albeit being largely influenced by Mitin's personality, Ziferblat is a contested space that is not single-handedly constructed by the founder alone but rather co-constructed by local teams, customers and media. However, staff/customer power dynamics do not always comply with Ziferblat's participatory ethos. Apart from that, each Ziferblat is largely shaped by local culture, geographic location, physical design, and economic and political factors.

4. How does Ziferblat mix different functions in one space and what opportunities and challenges arise from this approach to placemaking? I argue that Ziferblat addressed the globally shared need for multifunctional spaces, also suggesting solutions to some local issues of that nature in Russia and the UK. However, this case study also revealed many clashes, conflicts and misframings, resulting from the post-functionalist approach to placemaking.

5. How does post-digital culture manifest itself in Ziferblat? How does the presence of ICT affect sociability and community in this place? I argue that Ziferblat was conceived as a physical embodiment of the unbounded sociability, participatory ethos and non-hierarchy of social media. This idealised vision stemmed from Mitin's self-identification as a digital native. Furthermore, Ziferblat was constructed as a space welcoming all sorts of online activities but at the same time making special community-building efforts to encourage unmediated encounters. Ziferblat's sociability is shaped by a multitude of socio-spatial factors, and the use of ICT is not decisive in this regard.

6. What are the outcomes of this social experiment? Is Ziferblat capable of making social change? I argue that Ziferblat has a great potential in terms of social interaction and community building, albeit the impact of this increased conviviality on individuals is not always positive. Similarly, the analysis of social inclusion and diversity in Ziferblat poses some difficult questions. Ziferblat's potential for economic and political change also appears to be limited but there are some reasons for optimism.

The thesis is structured in the following way. Chapter 1, setting out the theoretical framework of this research project, locates Ziferblat in the context of current debates on placemaking, urban public space and the third place, also providing a more detailed discussion of the post-functionalist and the post-digital city concepts. Chapter 2 outlines the methodological framework of the study; it sheds light on the process of shaping the research theme and defining the overarching methodological strategy, provides a snapshot of the research sites, and critically discusses the repertoire of methods employed. Chapter 3 continues with the analysis of the historical and cultural context of Ziferblat's appearance, outlining the history of placemaking in Russia and analysing the impact of Mitin's life history on Ziferblat. Chapter 4 explores the key ideas underlying the reformative ethos of Ziferblat, unpicking the multiple dimensions of Ziferblat's otherness, represented in various spatial metaphors and embodied in its physical space and social practices and relations. Chapter 5 discusses the opportunities and challenges of Ziferblat's multifunctionality. It begins with an overview of the key functions performed by Ziferblat and examines the ways in which each of them is constructed, interpreted and practised and what power dynamics arise from mixing them in one space; the concluding section scrutinises Ziferblat's multifunctionality through the lens of food. Chapter 6 provides a critical analysis of the cultural politics of placemaking, situating Ziferblat in the cultures of three cities and tracing the development of Ziferblat's policies of interior and soundscape design and event organisation. Chapter 7 explores Ziferblat's architecture of conviviality and critically evaluates its potential for social change. The conclusion puts together the key

arguments of the thesis, contextualising the findings presented in each chapter within the overarching questions and themes.

Chapter 1. Theoretical framework

As mentioned in the introduction, Ziferblat was conceived as a reformatory project, rethinking many aspects of the idea of public place. The concept of Ziferblat resonates with the notion of the third place, coined by the sociologist Ray Oldenburg (1989) and popularised by the ex-CEO of Starbucks Howard Schultz. However, founder Ivan Mitin noted in a public talk in Moscow that he did not originally set out with the idea of creating Ziferblat as a third place. This happened organically:

I may have heard the term 'third place' but I didn't know what it means. I thought it's just the name of that website.⁴ When I was making Treehouse and Ziferblat, I didn't have a checklist, like, 'Third place is a home from home'—gotcha, done... But then everyone started calling Ziferblat a third place, so I did some reading... I guess, you can say that Ziferblat is a third place—unlike Starbucks, which is used as a third place but it's first and foremost a coffeeshop, or some barbershop in Baghdad, where neighbours can also gather to smoke hookah and play backgammon... whereas Ziferblat is first and foremost a third place. Tea, biscuits, events—it's all supplementary. (Mitin, 2012c)

Similarly, Mitin's idea of 'loose space' has no reference to the namesake concept coined by urban scholars Franck and Stevens (2007). While they use this term to describe spontaneous, unsanctioned and often transgressive practices of 'loosening' open public spaces (streets, sidewalks, squares, plazas, parks, abandoned warehouses and industrial sites) through temporary appropriation for various recreational, commercial and political activities, Ziferblat was designed as an intentionally loose space, situated in an indoor environment. As chapter 3 will demonstrate, Mitin was neither trained nor interested in placemaking until just a few months before he opened his first place in 2010. However, the phenomenon of Ziferblat embodies many concepts and issues that have been (or are starting to be) debated in urban sociology, human geography, cultural anthropology, consumer and service research and media studies, and practised in applied urbanism.

This chapter will begin with an overview of the literature on placemaking where a normative and empiricist approach dominating in applied urbanism will be reconsidered in the context of critical theories of space and place and redefined as the socio-spatial construction of public spaces and places and refocused on the issues of power and representation (section 1.1). Section 1.2 will contextualise this critical approach in relation to the third place theory, highlighting the ways in which the case study of Ziferblat contributes to this literature. It will also bring into focus two emerging areas of

⁴ See p. 75.

research looking at how third places are affected by post-digital and post-functionalist trends in urban culture.

1.1. Towards a critical theory of placemaking

The concept of placemaking, occasionally used in archaeological and anthropological studies (Andrews, 1975; Rubertone, 2008; Rössler, 2009; Corr, 2010), was popularised in the mid-1990s by a US-based non-profit organisation *Project for Public Spaces* as 'both an overarching idea and a hands-on tool for improving a neighborhood, city or region, (...) [that] involves the planning, design, management and programming of public spaces' (PPS, n.d.). Drawing on the pioneering works of American urbanists Jane Jacobs and William H. Whyte, who advocated the social and cultural importance of public spaces in the 1960s, PPS developed a number of principles and guidelines, constituting its approach to placemaking. Thus, PPS sees placemaking as a strictly bottom-up, participatory and not profit-driven practice:

Today, the term 'placemaking' is used in many settings—not just by citizens and organisations committed to grassroots community improvement, but also by planners and developers who use it as a 'brand' to imply authenticity and quality, even if their projects don't always live up to that promise. But using 'placemaking' in reference to a process that isn't really rooted in public participation dilutes its potential value. Making a place is not the same as constructing a building, designing a plaza, or developing a commercial zone. As more communities engage in placemaking and more professionals come to call their work 'placemaking', it is important to preserve the meaning and integrity of the process. (...) When people of all ages, abilities, and socio-economic backgrounds can not only access and enjoy a place, but also play a key role in its identity, creation, and maintenance, that is when we see genuine placemaking in action. (PPS, n.d., n.p.)

However, PPS's stance on the monetary aspect of placemaking lacks consistency ('To be successful, cities need destinations. They need destinations that give an identity and image to their communities, and that help attract new residents, businesses, and investment. But they also need strong community destinations that attract people') and depth ('Money is not the issue. (...) For example, once you've put in the basic infrastructure of the public spaces, the elements that are added that will make it work (e.g., vendors, cafes, flowers and seating) will not be expensive'). While dismissing the commercial side of placemaking, PPS employs the celebratory rhetoric of urban boosterism ('vibrant destination', 'thriving communities', 'great public place'). Another issue is PPS's instrumental, empiricist approach to placemaking, sometimes offering quite simplistic and questionable interpretations of the social life in public spaces. For instance, it is not entirely clear how PPS came up with the following axiom:

Cities of all sizes should have at least 10 destinations where people want to be. What makes each destination successful is that it has multiple places

within it. For example, a square needs at least 10 places: a cafe, a children's play area, a place to read the paper or drink a cup of coffee, a place to also sit, somewhere to meet friends, etc. Within each of the places, there should be at least 10 things to do. Cumulatively, these activities, places and destinations are what make a great city. (Ibid.)

Although PPS claims to have completed projects 'in more than 3000 communities in 47 countries and all 50 U.S. states' and rejects a 'one-size-fits-all' approach (Ibid.), it does not seem to take into consideration historical and socio-cultural contexts of the places to be made: 'Because this approach focuses on "places," it can apply to any community, regardless of differences in socioeconomic status, demographic makeup, or even geographic location' (PPS, 1997: 6). But most importantly, it completely ignores the power structures underlying the process of placemaking. The often-cited motto of PPS, formulated by its founder and president Fred Kent—'*Not only does everyone have the right to live in a great place, but to make that place better*'—provokes many questions if looked through the lens of critical urban theory. As Sharon Zukin (1995) reminds, the right to conceptualise a public space, to create its image, to invest it with meaning is always contested. She also shows how the renovation of New York's Bryant Park in the 1980s, guided by Whyte's recommendations, built on the exclusion of the 'undesirables'. Similarly, architectural theorist Kim Dovey (1999) argues that placemaking is an inherently political practice—not only because it is always driven by certain interests and reflective of 'the identities, differences and struggles of gender, class, race, culture and age' (p. 1), but also because 'placemaking is fundamentally about the invention and construction of the future' (p. 50). The Soviet Constructivist idea of the 'social condenser', to which I will get back in chapter 3, is perhaps the best illustration of Dovey's argument.

Notwithstanding the fact that PPS's interpretation of placemaking turned out to be very influential in applied urbanism, inspiring many activists and policymakers across the globe and, arguably, giving birth to another popular movement, known as tactical/DIY/guerrilla/everyday urbanism (Crawford, 1999; Hou, 2010; Lydon et al., 2011), it had little to contribute to theory. As a result, the existing literature on placemaking is dominated by toolkits (Walljasper, 2007; Hamdi, 2010), whereas more systematic and coherent methodologies are still rare (Arefi, 2014; Thomas, 2016). Both strands, however, lack a critical approach. For instance, Hamdi argues that placemaking can 'mediate the interests and values, cultural norms and religious practices' through engaging communities in participatory practices (p. 33), but does not comment on how these interests, values, norms and practices affect the very process of placemaking. In a similar vein, Arefi provides a taxonomy of placemaking practices and offers a wider and less normative understanding of placemaking than that of PPS (e.g., he discusses not only grassroots but also government-led projects), but

oversimplifies the relations between the spatial and the social. As Mohammadzadeh (2015) points out, Arefi sees placemaking as a process that starts with physical construction and ends with political framing, whereas in reality the latter precedes the former and then overlaps with it. Likewise, Mimi Zeiger (2011) warns that tactical urbanism initiatives are easily co-opted by larger organisations and calls for a critical and reflective approach evaluating the ideologies, contexts and contradictions of each particular project. To this can be added that such an approach would also need to draw on the principle of 'sociological imagination', drawing connections between public issues and private troubles (Mills, 1959). PPS website does indeed feature the short biographies of some, as it calls them, 'placemaking heroes'—academics, politicians, and only a few community activists—but more research is needed to trace how one's personal biography affects their approach to placemaking.

I argue that placemaking should be redefined as the socio-spatial construction of public spaces and places and refocused on the issues of power and representation. Hence, my socio-spatial analysis of Ziferblat will be based on Lefebvre's ([1974] 1991) theory of the production of space where this process is described as a triad of the conceived ('representations of space'), lived ('representational space') and perceived ('spatial practice') realms, later interpreted by Soja (1996) as a trialectic of the cognitive, physical and social dimensions of space. This conceptual framework is known to be confusing, as the distinction between these three elements is not entirely clear (Dovey, 1999; Shields, 1999; Hernes, 2004). To an extent, this ambiguity results from translation issues; thus, this triad is sometimes reframed as 'practised—conceived—lived' (Dovey, op. cit.: 49) or 'planned—practised—lived' (Petani and Mengis, 2016). Furthermore, as Zhang (2006: 221) notes, Lefebvre's conceptualisation, 'while effective in explaining the interactions among the three elements', is difficult to use as an analytical instrument: 'If we take a specific spatial event, say a man walks into his office as such-and-such a time, with such-and-such a gesture and in such-and-such a mood, can we easily settle it within any of the three pieces of jigsaw puzzle?'

Contrastingly, Zukin considers Lefebvre's theory open-ended and flexible rather than messy and vague. In her interpretation, it highlights 'the difference between physical space as experienced sensually and socially, as intellectualised, and as manipulated both physically and symbolically' (Zukin, 1995: 293) and therefore serves as a productive lens on the fluid process of the construction of culture in the postmodern city (p. 290). Similarly, Stanek (2007: 463) points out that Lefebvre's way of thinking about space is especially relevant today, as 'it facilitates research about the contemporary complexity of processes in which urban spaces are produced: conditioned by economic and political determinations, transformed by technology, saturated with images,

mediated in the news and yet constantly appropriated in the practices of everyday life'. In addition to this, I suggest that Lefebvre's triad is especially germane when applied to those cases of placemaking where social ethos is complemented or contradicted by commercial logic, commodifying certain images and representations of public spaces and places (e.g., 'vibrant neighbourhood', 'cosy cafe', 'sociable pub'). Speaking of the theory of placemaking more widely, the trialectic of the cognitive, the physical and the social not only foregrounds the issues of framing and representation but also challenges the project-thinking approach, as Lefebvre envisioned this model as a continuous interplay rather than a sequence of stages (cf. Mohammadzadeh's criticism of Arefi).

However, throughout my analysis of Ziferblat I faced the same difficulty as that mentioned above by Zhang. Therefore, I use Lefebvre's trialectic as an analytical principle rather than an algorithm. Drawing on his idea of the unity and continuity of the physical, cognitive and social dimensions of space and his focus on framing and representation, I nevertheless take the liberty to redefine the notions 'conceived', 'perceived' and 'lived' for the purposes of this specific case study. Thus, in this thesis I will talk about the conceived Ziferblat, meaning the way it was envisaged by the founder and staff, the perceived Ziferblat, meaning the way it is interpreted by customers and media, and the lived, or practised Ziferblat, meaning the real, spatialised practices and relations identified over the course of my fieldwork in Moscow, London and Manchester branches. Altogether, these three dimensions are inextricably linked with the physical space of Ziferblat, as will be shown throughout the thesis.

While Lefebvre's theory of the production of space seems heuristically useful for all sorts of placemaking projects, the reformatory ethos of Ziferblat required some special conceptualisation. In search of a theoretical framework capable of capturing the scope of ambition behind Mitin's idea, I turned to Foucault's theory of heterotopia. In his lecture 'Of Other Spaces', which was delivered in 1967 and remained unpublished until 1984, Foucault introduced this notion in the following way:

There are also, and this probably in all culture, in all civilisation, real places, effective places, places that are written into the institution of society itself, and that are a sort of counter-emplacements, a sort of effectively realised utopias in which (...) all the other real emplacements that can be found within culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted; a kind of places that are outside all places, even though they are actually localisable. Since these places are absolutely other than all the emplacements that they reflect, and of which they speak, I shall call them (...) heterotopias. (Foucault [1967] 2008: 17)

Further, Foucault outlined some key characteristics of heterotopia: 1) they exist in all cultures; 2) they can juxtapose several different, sometimes incompatible, spaces in one physical place; 3) they generate 'heterochronisms', breaking people away from their traditional time; 4) they are at the same time open and closed, penetrable for some and isolated from others, based on an intricate system of 'rites and purifications' (p. 18–21). While stressing that heterotopias take forms that are so varied that 'one would not find one single form of heterotopia that is absolutely universal' (p. 18), Foucault made an attempt to identify some more or less universal types of 'other spaces', such as the heterotopia of crisis (his examples include adolescence, menstruation, pregnancy in pre-modern cultures; boarding schools, military service, honeymoon trips in modern society); the heterotopia of deviation (e.g. rest homes, psychiatric hospitals, prisons); the heterotopia of eternity (e.g. museums, libraries); the heterotopia of festivity (e.g. carnivals, markets); the heterotopia of illusion (e.g. mirrors, brothels); and the heterotopia of compensation (e.g. colonies). Foucault's definition of the latter type—'[a] space as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is disorderly, ill construed and sketchy' (p. 21)—reads as a strikingly accurate description of Ziferblat. Not only was it constructed as the 'other' of traditional public places, but it also was supposed to compensate for the lack of unmediated sociability in the mediated city and at the same time transfer the idealised features of the online realm (participation, non-hierarchy, unbounded sociability) to the physical, offline space. Moreover, as chapter 3 will demonstrate, Mitin's project was intended to compensate for some historical issues in Russian placemaking.

Although Foucault's original conceptualisation of heterotopia is often criticised for its opacity and incoherence (Soja, 1996; Defert, 1997), this term might be interpreted as intrinsically indefinable and open-ended, which brings us back to Zukin's call for flexible methodologies. Besides, it has been afterwards contextualised and operationalised by other authors. Thus, James D. Faubion (2008: 35) draws a parallel between the concept of heterotopia and Turner's (1982) theory of liminality, as both were inspired by the 'intellectual ecology of the turbulent drift from the 1960s into the 1970s' with its interest to the 'unroutine'. Cath Lambert (2013) in her case study of a live art festival in Birmingham shows how heterotopia and heterochronism challenge and subvert normative spatial patterns and temporal rhythms of the neoliberal city. Lieven De Cauter and Michiel Dehaene (2008) suggest an updated theory of heterotopia, structured around the relations between the political, economic and cultural spheres in the Hippodamian plan of city layout. Defining heterotopia as a 'safe haven', 'sanctuary', 'asylum', or 'refuge', welcoming 'those for which (...) the city walls are closed' (p. 97), they emphasise that it is also an escape from the political and the economic into the cultural sphere, or 'the space of play', which 'suspends the everyday', making room for

leisure, arts, sports, and religion (p. 98). As they point out, heterotopias tend not to be profit-driven and rather based on the gift and sharing economies, but at the same time they are often funded through private donations or corporate sponsoring, or commodified by the service and leisure economies and creative industries. However, such spaces 'can easily take on a para-political, proto-political or infra-political role', serving as 'experimental terrains' where communities can 'gather their forces to maybe one day break ground in the full daylight' (p. 100).

De Cauter's and Dehaene's optimism is akin to critical urban theory's belief in 'the places of the possible', (Lefebvre, [1968] 1996: 156), or 'spaces of hope' (Harvey, 2000), quietly cultivating some forms of political resistance in the 'holes and chasms' (Lefebvre, op. cit.) of the capitalist system. As Marcuse (2009: 195) elaborates, such spaces include those sectors of everyday life 'that are (...) within [the profit system] but not of it, that are not motivated by profit but rely on solidarity, humanity, the flexing of muscles and the development of creative impulses'.

This ambiguous 'within but not of' position, in turn, can be linked to the notion of the Third Space, introduced in two independent contexts—Bhabha's (1994) postcolonial theory of cultural hybridity and Soja's (1996) postmodern geography. While the former used this term to describe the hybrid cultural identities of migrants, the latter, inspired by Lefebvre's trialectic of space and Foucault's concept of heterotopia, sought to deconstruct the binary way of thinking about space. Thus, for Bhabha, Third Space means 'neither One nor the Other, but something else besides, in-between' (p. 224), '[giving] rise to something different, (...) new and unrecognisable' (p. 211), whereas Soja advocates for a 'both/and also' logic instead of making 'either/or' choices. Although this thesis rarely refers to the Third Space theory directly (except for the next section and chapter 3 where I discuss the impact of Mitin's post-socialist identity on his placemaking aspirations), my vision of Ziferblat as a post-functionalist, post-digital, glocal, social-and-commercial, heterotopic space was largely shaped by this hybrid and non-binary epistemology.

1.2. Updating the third place theory

An extensive literature has developed around the interrelation of such phenomena as sociability and urban public space. Sociability has traditionally been considered one of the key features of urban life and, conversely, urban public spaces and places have been evaluated on the basis of their ability to encourage social life (Simmel, [1903] 1950, [1911] 1949; Benjamin, 1999; Park, 1925; Mumford, 1938; Wirth, 1938; Jacobs, 1961; Habermas, [1962] 1989; Rudofsky, 1969; Gehl, [1971] 1987; Lofland, 1973,

1998; Sennett, 1977, 1990; Whyte, 1980; Zukin, 1995; Low, 2000). Although this body of research is very rich and variegated, some general trends can be discerned.

Regardless of the author's generational belonging and disciplinary background, their principal concern is with the decline of social interaction, community, and public sphere in the city, explained with such reasons as single-use zoning and, in the North American context, suburbanisation (Oldenburg, 1989; Drucker and Gumpert, 1991; Putnam, 2000), the development of ICT (Graham, 2004), the increasing privatisation of public space (Davis, 1990; Sorkin, 1992; Kayden, 2000; Kohn, 2004), some deeper cultural shifts, such as 'the fall of public man' (Sennett, 1977), or the very character of city life (Simmel, [1903] 1950; Wirth, 1938). However, few practical recommendations have been offered to address this problem. One, and perhaps the most influential of them (as the previous section has demonstrated) is Whyte's (1980) study where he highlighted the positive impact of moveable chairs, food carts and the so-called 'triangulators', defined as 'external stimuli [providing a linkage between people and prompting] strangers to talk to one another'⁵ (p. 94), on sociability in miniparks, plazas and ledges. On the other hand, it is still not entirely clear to what extent social interaction in urban public space can be stimulated by physical design. As urban anthropologist Lisa Peattie (1998: 248) famously stated,

Conviviality can take place with few props: the corner out of the wind where friends drink coffee together, the vacant lot which will become a garden. But it must have some sort of material base—the right-shaped corner, the piece of vacant land and a couple of rakes—and it must have the rules that permit it. Conviviality cannot be coerced but it can be encouraged by the right rules the right props, and the right places and spaces.

When it comes to positive examples of sociable urban public spaces, inspirations tend to be found in the idealised images of the past (e.g. the 'urban village' model, promoted by Janet Jacobs) or in foreign cultures (thus, European street life is often discussed as an ideal prototype by US and UK authors—see, e.g., Rudofsky, 1969; Montgomery, 1997). However, while most researchers criticise the existing public spaces for their noncompliance with certain criteria, such as sociability, community-building potential, or social inclusion, some critically interrogate these criteria themselves. For instance, Atkinson (2003: 1830) argues that hardly any public space is fully accessible to everyone. In a similar vein, Kern (2008: 112) refers to some earlier criticisms (Crawford, 1999; Mitchell, 2003; Graham and Marvin, 2003), pointing out that the concern for the loss of public space is often driven by a nostalgia 'for a vision of public

⁵ The examples of such triangulators, listed by Whyte, include certain situations (e.g. observing an accident), street characters, physical objects (e.g. sculptures), spectacular views, musicians and entertainers, etc. This incredibly wide variety of phenomena illustrates the analytical limitations of an empiricist approach to placemaking.

space that perhaps never truly existed', as public streets have always mixed public zones with privately owned spaces, not to mention that 'the idyllic public spaces of the agora (...) were often not freely accessible to members of society who were not deemed citizens, for example, women and slaves'. Furthermore, as Alice Mah (2009: 290) reminds us, the concept of community, often romanticised in urban sociology, is a 'contested term with political connotations' that should always be used with caution (for a detailed overview of the literature discussing 'the dark side' of community—exclusion, inequality, oppression and social divisions—see Crow and Mah, 2012). Oosterman (1992: 157–159) calls for a historically and culturally sensitive approach that would acknowledge the individual perspective instead of being preoccupied with normative and often romanticised ideas regarding urban public space:

I suggest that we ask (...) whether it is fruitful trying to reintroduce forms of public space use that were developed in a different society, against a different cultural-economic background. Hence, instead of focusing on the way it should be, it might be more fruitful to study urban life in public places the way it is. (...) Most social scientists dealing with urban public space also tend to regard processes that take place in the public realm as a contribution to the social organisation, as a fulfillment of societal needs. This top-down-view, however, neglects the daily user's perspective.

According to Lum (2013: 53), the debates on the social role of urban public space mostly focus on outdoor spaces, such as streets, parks, squares and plazas, while social interaction in indoor environments is less researched. However, there is an entire theory centred first and foremost upon indoor public places—Oldenburg's (1989) theory of the third place. By third places (as opposed to home as the 'first place' and work as the 'second place'), Oldenburg means 'a great variety of public places that host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work' (p. 41). He also notes that the importance of such places varies with cultural context and historical era. Hence, his key argument is based on the observation that the social and cultural role of the third place became more prominent after the separation of the private realm of home and the public realm of the workplace over the course of industrialisation (Evans and Boyte, 1986), albeit the development of this phenomenon in American culture has been hampered by rigid zoning laws and suburbanisation. Though Oldenburg's conceptualisation of the third place is quite arbitrary in terms of the scope of phenomena included (he talks about cafes, pubs, taverns, bars, bookstores and hair salons), it has quite tight criteria. Thus, in Oldenburg's view, the third place must be: 1) a neutral ground, i.e. a place where people may come and go as they please, and none are required to play host; 2) a leveller, i.e. an inclusive place where economic or social status does not matter; 3) a place where the main activity is conversation (to which 'everyone is expected to contribute'); 4) an accessible (in terms of location and opening hours) local place in the

neighbourhood; 5) a community centred around the regulars; 6) a low profile place with a 'plain', 'homely' design; 7) a place with a playful mood (where 'serious conversations' are 'doomed to failure'); and, finally, 8) a home away from home, providing both physical and psychological comfort.

Oldenburg, of course, was not the first sociologist to explore that kind of place. The Chicago school studied social interaction in ethnic coffeehouses, neighbourhood taverns, downtown cocktail lounges, ghetto bars, and liquor stores (Zorbaugh, 1929; Gotlieb, 1957; Anderson, 1978). In his groundbreaking work *The Culture of Cities*, Mumford (1938: 318) mentioned the impact of the coffeehouse on the development of European intellectual life in the 17th century. This point was later extended by Sennett (1977) and Habermas ([1962] 1989), who highlighted the role of 17th-century English coffeehouses, 18th-century French salons, and some other historical public places (theatres, public houses, pleasure gardens) as important centres of social and cultural life and hotbeds of the public sphere. However, it was Oldenburg who coined a catchy umbrella term for such places, which became incredibly popular not only within but also outside academia. During the last two decades, his theory has been significantly enriched by many studies on cafes and diners (Germain, 2001; Cheang, 2002; Kleinman, 2006; Rosenbaum, 2006; Tatsak, 2006; Rosenbaum et al., 2007; Rice, 2009; Kusiak and Kacperski, 2012); pubs (Cabras and Mount, 2017); bars and breweries (Grazian, 2009; Dillivan, 2012; Mega, 2012); malls and retail stores (Johnstone and Todd, 2012); museums and arts centres (Slater and Koo, 2010); churches (Swagerty, 2008); libraries (Lawson, 2002; Audunson, 2005; Harris, 2007; Frey and Codispoti, 2010; Pajouh, 2014); and online spaces, i.e. forums, chat rooms and social networking sites (Steinkuehler, 2005; Brown and Bell, 2006; Soukup, 2006; Ducheneaut et al., 2007; Foster, 2013). Apart from that, Oldenburg's concept has had many practical applications—for instance, it shaped the idea of Starbucks, thereby affecting the global cafe culture (Schultz and Yang, 1997; Pendergrast, 1999; Thompson and Arsel, 2004) and greatly influenced the global library-as-place placemaking movement (Meyrick, 2007).

However, it also proved to have many limitations, some of which seem to have been inherited from the wider scholarship on urban public spaces and places. Thus, Oldenburg's third place is an extremely normative concept largely fuelled by a false nostalgia for spaces like the classic English coffeehouse, which he described in a manner very similar to that of Habermas and Sennett. However, many studies have challenged this romanticised vision of 17th-century coffeehouses as spaces of socially inclusive conviviality and seedbeds of democracy (Fraser, 1992; Gaudio, 2003; Cowan, 2005). Furthermore, as Laurier (2005: 14) notes, this fetishisation of the Habermasian

coffeehouse '[overstates] the significance of serious discourse over a lighter mode of being together' (see also a similar criticism of Sennett in: Montgomery, 1997: 88). Even though Oldenburg, as mentioned above, does not believe in 'serious conversations' in third places, he sees a third place encounter as a verbal discussion where everyone is expected to participate. In contrast to this, ethnographic research on social interaction in cafes shows that third place communities are based on much subtler forms of sociability. In her study of a small South London caff, Suzanne Hall (2009: 84–85) highlights how a seemingly 'unsociable' mode of use feeds into one's sense of belonging in a third place:

Hinga, who left Sierra Leone 12 years ago, slips into the Caff at the same time most mornings and sits upfront, close to Nick [the owner]. He always orders tea and toast, makes limited eye contact, and glances up to watch the telly, occasionally talking to Nick. Hinga doesn't partake in any of the general conversations, and doesn't conform to any particular groups in the Caff. But this is Hinga's local place and he reserves his space through the regular act of sitting.

Similarly, the residents of British deprived neighbourhoods interviewed by Hickman (2013) emphasised the positive impact of nonverbal encounters, i.e. simply seeing familiar faces in local third places. Wise (2011) and Jones et al. (2015) discussed the important role of light-touch, inattentive forms of sociality in everyday multicultural encounters in Australian shopping mall food courts and UK chain cafes and fast food restaurants (apart from that, both studies disproved Oldenburg's belief⁶ that neither malls nor chains can be considered third places). Aksel Tjora (2013), referring to Granovetter's (1973) dichotomy of strong and weak social ties, argues that cafe communities are built on even more ephemeral connections—'subtle ties'. Drawing on a multi-site mini-ethnography conducted in Australia, Norway and the USA, he identified five key types of communal processes producing such subtle ties: 'recognising the other' (smiles, greetings); 'experiencing situations together' (e.g., small talks about weather); 'perceiving the other's needs' (e.g., sharing power outlets, chargers, wifi passwords); 'trusting the other' (leaving one's personal belongings behind when going to the bathroom); and 'showing and accepting curiosity' (commenting on other customer's activities). Likewise, Erling Dokk Holm (2013) points out that even passive presence in a cafe setting improves many customers' mental well-being, as it transforms loneliness to a more positive state of solitude. Driven by the question of why, despite the widely discussed social potential of third places for creating social capital, most customers come to, sit in and leave cafes on their own, he

⁶ 'Suburban zoning has replaced "public characters" with the retailers and their employees in the malls and out on the strips. The chains in which these people work thrive by killing off local commercial establishments, and the people who operate the chains do nothing for the community in the way that "public characters" do' (Oldenburg, 1989: 18).

concluded that such places ‘embed a social contract of silent community’ (p. 183). People he interviewed in Norwegian coffee bars echoed Hickman’s participants, stressing the opportunity to just be around other people with no obligations to make stronger social connections. Importantly, the latter four studies also challenged Oldenburg’s understanding of third places as necessarily local (i.e. situated close to one’s home) venues.

Not only has Oldenburg’s theory been criticised for anecdotal argumentation and the lack of empirical evidence (Frey and Codispoti, 2010; Hickman, 2013), but it also has demonstrated little heuristic value. In fact, most attempts to operationalise it, applying the suggested criteria to the existing public places, failed to find any real examples of what he considered a ‘true’ third place (see, e.g., Germain, 2001; Grazian, 2009; Tatsak, 2006; Yuen and Johnson, 2017). Remarkably, in one of his latest publications Oldenburg (2013: 9) explicitly refused to acknowledge the above-cited literature on ‘virtual third places’:

Owing to the remarkable advances in electronic communication, it has become fashionable for many to argue in behalf of ‘virtual’ third places, which one can engage while sitting at his or her computer. That notion, however, abuses the word ‘virtual’, which means that one thing is the same as another in both essence and effect. As Christopher Lasch⁷ observed, the difference between face-to-face versus electronic communication is that between participating and being a spectator.

Some authors, however, turn this limitation into a possibility. Thus, Yuen and Johnson (2017: 299), despite their purist interpretation of Oldenburg’s criteria (i.e. they refuse to regard Starbucks a third place), raise an important analytical point, encouraging researchers ‘to recognise the complexity and intersectionality associated with experiences of marginalisation and issues of diversity’ in third places. Hickman (2013), instead of disregarding certain establishments as noncompliant with the criteria of the third place, analysed the barriers to social interaction that his study revealed, such as feeling unwelcomed by the regulars; lack of social confidence and discomfort in social situations (which was especially true for new and solo visitors); infirmity, ill-health and disability. Jones et al. (2015: 657–658), likewise, argue that the possibility of confident use makes franchised servicescapes in fact more inclusive than ‘more boutique, (...) intensely “local” consumption spaces’.

One of the most striking gaps in Oldenburg’s theory is the commercial aspect of third places and its impact on their social function. Except for blaming malls and chains for murdering local hangout places, his study largely ignores the fact that, as Johnstone and Todd (2012: 446) remind us, most third places are servicescapes—physical

⁷ Lasch, C. (1995) *The Revolt of the Elites*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company.

surroundings in consumption settings belonging to the service economy. This gap was partially addressed in consumer and service research, although this body of literature is still small and, what is more, it often demonstrates a completely different approach to placemaking than that established in urban sociology. Thus, Fleener's (2005) idea of the 'fourth place'—a place for like-minded people with similar interests—draws on an observation that targeting places at smaller sub-groups builds up more customer loyalty. Rosenbaum et al. (2007: 55) argue that the ability of a third place to create the sense of attachment, belonging and community can reduce the profit and therefore needs to be carefully calibrated:

(...) service firms must determine whether they want to serve as a host for their customers' supportive relationships. Consumers who seek support in third places and visit these places on a near-daily basis include the older-aged, the elderly, the lonely, and those who belong to marginalised groups. Any establishment that targets one of these groups will significantly alter its social servicescape by becoming a forum for a specific group of consumers who may repulse other consumer groups.

Other consumer research studies focus on issues of representation. Rice (2009) discusses sociable atmosphere as a significant competitive advantage increasingly employed in the marketing positioning of fast food restaurants. Lugosi's (2007) ethnography of a UK queer bar highlighted the role of such forms of consumer participation as performative display and occasional frontline labour in the production of hospitality, encapsulated in the myths of commonality, safety and liberated play. Linnet's (2013) study of Danish cafes provides a detailed analysis of how third places construct the sense of cosiness through interior design, soundscape, scentscape and staff/customer relations, echoing the findings of earlier research on American coffeeshops (Waxman, 2006). Like Lugosi, Linnet brings into focus customers' role in the production of the atmosphere, pointing out that blurring roles between staff and guests displays an environment that is 'symbolically distanced from core capitalist phenomena such as profit-seeking, mass production, and impersonal non-place relations' (p. 9). Similarly, Thompson and Arsel (2004) show how both independent and chain coffeeshops capitalise on a 'nostalgic, Disneyfied vision of nineteenth-century Gemeinschaft solidarity' (p. 639) and how the anticorporate and countercultural sentiment is often appropriated and exploited by the profit-driven, commodity logic of corporate capitalism. Finally, consumer research on glocalised servicescapes (Belson, 2001; Yue, 2003; Thompson and Arsel, op. cit.; Smith Maguire and Hu, 2013) provides a cross-cultural perspective on the use of third places, although studies discussing the circulation of cultural forms rather than brands are very rare. For instance, Kjeldgaard and Ostberg (2007: 178) argue that in the second part of the 20th century 'coffee cultures flowed, creolised and materialised in new forms as a global cultural economy emerged', but only briefly discuss the examples of such creolisation (e.g. the

transformation of the American diner into the working class kaffebar in the 1930s Scandinavia). Interestingly, Oldenburg discusses only one phenomenon of that kind—the beer garden, brought to the US by German immigrants, while most of his book is devoted to ‘classic’ third places in their original form.

Oldenburg’s retrospective focus made him overlook two important trends changing the third place culture in the post-Fordist city. First, as follows from his above-cited comment on ‘virtual third place’ studies, he neglects the role of digital communication in contemporary social life, not to mention its penetration into physical urban space. Both developments have been widely discussed in the interdisciplinary literature exploring the impact of ICT on urban public space and social interaction in the city. My earlier research on the history of this field, sometimes labelled as ‘urban ICT studies’ (Graham, 2004), or ‘mediated urbanism studies’ (Ridell and Zeller, 2013), identified three paradigms that I called ‘pre-virtual’, ‘virtual’, and ‘post-virtual’ (Kviat, 2014a), though, given how the term ‘virtual’ is becoming more and more obsolete, this triad might be reframed as ‘pre-digital’, ‘digital’, and ‘post-digital’. The first systematic studies of the impact of media technologies on urban life (the 1950s—1980s), despite not using such terms as ‘virtual’ or ‘digital’, outlined some focal points for further research, such as privatism and the decline of unmediated sociability (Meier, 1953; Deutsch, 1961; Gehl [1971] 1987, Sennett, 1977). The expansion of personal computers and home internet in the next two decades (the 1990s—early 2000s) sharpened these debates, focusing them around the dominant theme of this period—the gap between the real and virtual/cyber/digital city, mostly discussed in an alarmist or, conversely, idealistic manner (Boyer, 1992; Mitchell, 1995; Putnam, 2000; Wellman, 2001). The third paradigm, driven by the development of mobile and wireless technologies (since the mid-2000s), criticises this binary real-versus-virtual approach (perfectly illustrated by Oldenburg’s argument) and conceptualises urban space as a hybrid of both online and offline realms, stressing that they can no longer be discussed as two separate spaces (De Souza e Silva, 2006; Ridell and Zeller, 2013; Walторp, 2013; Quan-Haase and Martin, 2013). Seeking to rethink the concept of the virtual/cyber/digital city, Gumpert and Drucker (2005: 21) suggested a new normative model—the ‘tertium quid city’ (from a Latin term meaning an unknown or indefinite thing related in some way to two known or definite things but distinct from both), ‘describing and advocating an environment reshaped by media but accommodating the preservation of the old social environments’. Although these authors did not refer to Bhabha’s or Soja’s theories of the Third Space, their idea draws on the same epistemological model. Thus, they see the tertium quid city as a ‘city of new expectations, a place composed of its physical and electronic parts but distinctive and greater than the simple sum of its parts’ (Ibid.).

Looking at this idea more closely, one might ask if this combination of the offline and the online in urban public space really works in a complementary or at least non-conflicting manner, like Gumpert and Drucker hoped. A lot has been written in the past two decades on how the use of ICT creates private zones within the public realm. While some scholars argue that it results in the disengagement from community, 'absent presence' (Gergen, 2002) and being 'alone together' (Turkle, 2011), others suggest less straightforward interpretations (Hampton and Gupta, 2008; Hampton et al., 2010). In their large-scale study, looking at how people establish and manage physically colocated and virtually copresent social ties through wifi use in American and Canadian cafes and parks, Hampton and his co-researchers identified two types of ICT users—'true mobiles', who deeply engage with their devices and avoid contact with the people around them, and 'placemakers', who, despite using devices, are open and willing to interact with strangers. Although this dichotomy is not absolute, these types are quite steady, as the observed users did not change patterns within the same setting (Hampton and Gupta, 2008: 843). The authors conclude that the use of ICT is not deterministic per se, but the higher the number of people involved in virtual communication within a public place, the less opportunity for new colocated connections. In light of this, the sympathetic attitude of Broadway et al. (2018), closely following Oldenburg in their understanding of the third place concept, to the elimination (or just absence) of wifi and the ban of laptops in many cafes across the world looks somewhat anachronistic. Furthermore, their interpretation of this initiative as the desire of cafe owners to mitigate the 'apparent stifling effect [of digital devices] on conversation' (p. 22) simply ignores the fact that such policies are very likely to be driven by the commercial logic of increasing the customer turnover through preventing them from lingering. In contrast to this, Ziferblat was designed as a truly post-digital space, not only inspired by digital culture, but also providing high-speed wifi by default, while making great efforts to encourage unmediated sociability—even though gadget ban might have seemed a more appropriate solution for one seeking to create 'social media in real life'.

Speaking more widely, Broadway et al., just like Oldenburg, neglect another important trend—the rise of the 'post-functionalist city', where 'the boundaries between urban functions have become blurred, where different functions co-exist in the same space, and where new and unprecedented functions emerge through citizens' appropriation of places' (Di Marino and Lapintie, 2017: 6). Although the hybridisation of home, workplace and leisure is not new (see, e.g., Cowan, 2005 and Betsworth, 2012 on the use of cafes in the 17-19th century as office/study spaces and extended living rooms), Di Marino and Lapintie point out that the development of ICT and the growing flexibility in work arrangements has had a great impact on the blurring of urban functions. As a

result, not only home but also third places—cafes and libraries—are increasingly used as temporary workplaces. Another manifestation of this trend is the proliferation of coworking spaces, intentionally designed as temporary working locations. Drawing on the findings from their observations and interviews conducted in three sites in Helsinki (a library, a cafe, and a coworking space), accompanied by a review of the emerging body of research looking into the use of public places as temporary workstations, Di Marino and Lapintie suggest that urban planners and placemakers should rethink the functionalist division of spaces and services. They also argue that ‘physical and virtual boundaries should both be kept in mind in a systematic view when exploring public and semi-public spaces’ (p. 21). A similar call for a post-digital focus in urban public space studies was articulated by Henriksen and Tjora (2018: 13) in their study on the ‘cafe worker species’:

While scholars such as Sennett (...) and Turkle (...) have been concerned with new forms of social connectivity in relation to work (...) and digital media (...), sociology needs to maintain a broader interest in how social interaction, work and public space are being transformed and inter-related in other ways with the application of ubiquitous technologies.

Whereas the phenomenon of working from home and public places attracts a lot of attention both within and outside academia (see, e.g., the Guardian’s trend piece on the ‘coffice’—‘half coffee shop, half office’ in: The Guardian, 2014), less is known about other directions of the post-functionalist reshuffling, such as opening up the private space of home for public use within the framework of supper club (Purnell, 2015; Johnson, 2016) or ‘hoffice’ (Savage, 2017). The latter is a non-profit placemaking initiative originating from Sweden; it encourages people working from home to set up communal workplaces for other remote workers. An example of a study looking into the opposite direction of the public/private shift in the post-functionalist city is Elena Kilina’s (2012) dissertation on the use of Japanese manga cafes, capsule hotels, 24 hour convenience stores, karaoke venues and saunas as second homes. Another manifestation of the post-functionalist trend is the emergence of even more multidimensional spaces, e.g. barbershop/brewery, hostel/coworking space, or even coworking space/coffeeshop/bar/nightclub (Luckhurst, 2016). However, as Katharyne Mitchell (1997) noted in her critique of ‘the hype of hybridity’ (meaning Bhabha’s understanding of the Third Space, which, nevertheless, can be extended to the context of the post-functionalist city), hybridity is not necessarily positive, progressive and liberatory. Thus, more research is needed on the outcomes resulting from mixing different functions in one physical space. As Iveson and Fincher (2011) note in their study of the library-as-place movement in Australia, establishing different zones for different activities (e.g. computer use, group discussion, quiet reading, etc.) mitigates inter-functional tensions but also reduces the socialising potential of public libraries.

Conclusion

Summing up, this thesis aims to contribute to a critical (rather than normative or empiricist) theory of placemaking, redefined as the socio-spatial construction of public spaces and places and refocused on the issues of power and representation. This approach, drawing on Lefebvre's theory of the production of space, Foucault's concept of heterotopia and the 'Third Space' epistemology outlined by Bhabha and Soja, also seeks to acknowledge the historical and cultural context of placemaking initiatives, their social/commercial dynamics, and the impact of the personal biographies of placemakers⁸ on the places they create.

Applied to Oldenburg's concept of the third place, this approach highlighted many limitations and gaps that will be addressed in the case study of Ziferblat. Thus, drawing on the recent criticisms of Oldenburg's theory, this case study will bring into focus 'the micro-geographies of encounter' (Jones et al., 2015), looking into individual experiences and interpersonal dynamics in the third place and acknowledging not only positive but also negative aspects of sociability and community. Further, this case study, complementing a sociological perspective with the consumer and service research lens, will shed light on the intricate relations between social ethos and commercial logic in third places and trace the cross-cultural journey of this new form of public place. Finally, this case study will update Oldenburg's theory by contributing to two distinct but interrelated areas of research, one of which is already established, while another one is very recent.

First, analysed as a manifestation of post-digital culture, the case study of Ziferblat will advance the discussion on the online/offline dialectic in urban social life. Not only does Ziferblat blend these two realms, as happens in all other public places, but it also seeks to apply some elements of digital culture in a physical public place, at the same time encouraging unmediated communication between strangers. Second, this research aims to contribute to the emerging literature on the 'post-functionalist city' (Di Marino and Lapintie, 2017), which is currently focused on the use of cafes, libraries and coworking spaces as temporary workplaces, whereas the case study of Ziferblat—a space blurring the boundaries between home, work and leisure—will provide a wider perspective on this subject. However, I am also hoping to deepen this discussion by focusing on the issues of construction, representation and power; another goal is to

⁸ Here and in chapter 2 I use the word 'placemakers' to identify the role of Mitin and other anti-cafe owners as *principal* placemakers. I do keep in mind, though, that places like Ziferblat are co-constructed and contested.

explore not only possibilities but also limitations of the post-functionalist approach to placemaking.

Following Oldenburg's (1989) observation that the role of the third place varies with cultural context and historical era and Oosterman's (1992) call for a historically and culturally sensitive approach to urban public space studies, I will devote chapter 3 to a detailed overview of the history of placemaking and third places in Russia, linking it with the biography of Ziferblat's founder Ivan Mitin. But before moving to that discussion, the methodological framework of this study has to be explained.

Chapter 2. Methodology

This chapter will outline the methodological framework underpinning the research on Ziferblat. In section 2.1, I will discuss how the research theme has been developing, shaping the overarching methodological strategy and refining the research questions. Section 2.2 will provide a snapshot of research sites in terms of their location, spatial layout and price policy, and then further specify the repertoire of methods utilised in this study, reflecting on the benefits, limitations, challenges and insights that they brought.

2.1. ‘Why go to such places?!’ Shaping the research theme and methodology

This research started with two moments of surprise. In July 2012, I read a post on my local city forum in Omsk, Russia—someone was looking for companions to test a new board game that she designed; the meet-up was going to happen in a place called *‘the anti-cafe “Prime Time”’*. By that time, most of my friends moved from Omsk to other cities, so I was happy to meet new people. But my second thought was, naturally, *‘What on earth is an anti-cafe?’* After two minutes of googling, I knew what to expect: something like a cafe but for socialising rather than eating, and you also have to pay by the minute. When I arrived there and joined the group of players where no one knew each other before, it struck me—a person who has never been particularly comfortable in such situations—how convivial and relaxed the atmosphere was at our table. As we continued to meet there every week or couple of weeks, with new people coming and going or staying, I also noticed how open but at the same time fluid and ephemeral this community was. Thus, you could join easily and spend a nice evening playing, chatting and laughing with strangers and then become friends with some of them, but you could also leave just as easily and never see those people again. Although now I cannot remember most faces and names from my time in that anti-cafe, the person who posted that invitation has become and remains one of my closest friends.

That said, I could not help but see this place through the lens of media studies, which is where my research and teaching sat at the time. Just two months before I walked into that anti-cafe, all Russian television channels showed Putin’s cortege speeding through the centre of Moscow to his third inauguration ceremony. The city was dead-quiet and completely cleared of people; altogether, it looked like a scene from a dystopian film. Given the context—the six months of massive urban protests against his comeback to the presidency, announced well before the election, and a brutal crackdown on the most recent rally that happened one day before the inauguration—

this scene symbolically asserted the power of the 'city of authorities'. Meanwhile, the 'city of citizens' gathered on Chistoprudny Boulevard, a pedestrian street within three kilometres from Kremlin, and set up an Occupy camp, run on donations and organised through general assemblies. This peaceful six-day protest embodied and displayed the new forms of solidarity and cooperation that had been developing in Russia since the late 2000s. Briefly put, this new culture, born in social media, was driven by a grassroots and DIY ethos and sought to apply it in the physical reality. The more I was observing the manifestations of this new culture—protests, volunteering movement, urban activism, various placemaking initiatives, including anti-cafes—the more my research interests were shifting from media studies to urban sociology and human geography. However, as this thesis demonstrates, it was not a complete breakup, as I incorporated a media studies perspective into my interdisciplinary theoretical framework. Another component—consumer and service research—stems from the fact that my first degree was in marketing communication, which could not but affect my vision of Ziferblat.

When I moved to the UK and started a PhD course in 2014, it became clear that the discussion of the Russian 'city of citizens' had to be narrowed down to some specific practice(s) or project(s). While I was trying to find my focus, I came across the news that the first Russian anti-cafe had just opened a branch in London. This was the second moment of surprise. By that time, I had briefly discussed anti-cafes as a new phenomenon of Russian urban culture in a couple of conference presentations in Europe and the US; the reaction was always the same—a mix of curiosity and skepticism (as I remember, one colleague from Spain almost shouted: '*But why go to such places?!*'). Thus, I was used to thinking of anti-cafes as an intrinsically Russian phenomenon that would not be relevant in the countries with more established cafe cultures. Asking myself '*Why go to such places in London?*', I started reframing my project as a cross-cultural rather than regional research. Meanwhile, Ziferblat opened another branch in Manchester and came to Slovenia; further mapping traced the appearance of non-Ziferblat anti-cafes in Europe, North America and Asia.

By the end of 2015, my research had developed into a study of the anti-cafe as a new phenomenon of global urban life. I was interested in the 'whatness', 'whyness' and 'howness' of this new form of public place, i.e. how such places are different from and similar to other forms (first and foremost, but not exclusively, cafes); why they emerged in Russia and how wide is their geography; and how they are produced and used in different cities and countries. Hence, my analysis was guided by an inductive approach. As Genoe McLaren (2010: 457) notes, '[b]y letting theory emerge from the data, research can be conducted in areas for which limited theoretical knowledge

exists'. In this inductive case study, Ziferblat was supposed to serve as a paradigmatic (Flyvbjerg, 2006) but at the same time unique (Yin, 1994) case. I saw it as paradigmatic because it was a pioneering prototype for a new category of public places and unique for it was the very first anti-cafe and, later, the very first chain of anti-cafes; furthermore, it was the only anti-cafe chain that moved outside Russian-speaking countries and became global.⁹ Therefore, this research, framed as a global ethnography (Burawoy et al., 2000; Gille and Ó Riain, 2002), was designed as simultaneously a single and a multiple case study (Yin, 1994), looking at different branches of the same chain.

As Gille and Ó Riain (op. cit.: 287) argue, 'the extension of fieldwork to several sites [must] be dictated not by the logic of the ethnographer but by the character of (...) social relations (...) within and between sites'. Initially, I saw the global ethnography of Ziferblat as a study of four branches located in Moscow, Kyiv, Ljubljana and London. The choice of four world capitals would have allowed for a greater symmetry between cases, also tracing Ziferblat's geographical and cultural journey from Russia to Russian-speaking Ukraine and then to non Russian-speaking but also post-socialist Slovenia and, finally, to its most distant—both geographically and culturally—destination, the UK.¹⁰ However, such a large-scale ethnography could hardly be accomplished within the framework of a PhD project. On that account, for the purposes of logistics I focused on two branches in Moscow (Pokrovka and Tverskaya),¹¹ one in London (Old Street) and one more in Manchester (Edge Street). The inclusion of Tverskaya and Edge Street branches largely deepened my perspective, illuminating the similarities and differences between Ziferblats located in the same city (Pokrovka and Tverskaya) and country (Old Street and Edge Street). Not only did it prevent me from drawing simplistic conclusions, interpreting all inter-branch differences as cultural differences between Russia and the UK, but it also let me explore Ziferblat's intricate relationships with local city cultures. Furthermore, the Manchester case study provided an additional perspective of a non-capital city. Covering two sites in Moscow reflected the state of the anti-cafe culture in this city (361 venues, as of the end of 2017), as

⁹ According to my mapping, there is currently only one other international anti-cafe chain in the world, called *Anticafé*. It was founded in 2014 by two Russian expats and their Italian partner in France. As of 2018, *Anticafé* has twelve branches in France and one more in Italy (Rome), which makes them a European rather than global chain, whereas Ziferblat has branches in CIS region (Russia, Ukraine), Central Europe (Slovenia), the UK, and Asia (Mongolia).

¹⁰ It is important to note, though, that it was not a linear trajectory moving Ziferblat from Russia further and further to the 'West'. Thus, Slovenian branch appeared one year after Ziferblat's opening in London.

¹¹ Both Moscow Ziferblats, as well as other branches, are named after the streets where they are located (e.g., *Ziferblat in Pokrovka*). For the sake of brevity, I will use their short names throughout the thesis.

opposed to London and Manchester, where Ziferblat does not seem to have any direct competitors yet.

Epistemologically, my research of Ziferblat was an interpretive case study, seeking to analyse meanings and practices emerging in a specific social and cultural context and by so doing enrich existing theories without making universalising claims (Geertz, 1983; Thompson and Arsel, 2004). Ontologically, I approached Ziferblat as a socially and culturally constructed space that, in turn, constructs certain social and cultural practices and identities (Heynen and Loeckx, 1998). This overarching methodological orientation shaped my selection of methods. The process of data collection began with the analysis of the media discourse on anti-cafes in general and Ziferblat in particular (June 2015–June 2016), followed by the multi-site ethnography conducted in four Ziferblats in Moscow, London and Manchester, which included participant observations and semi-structured interviews (July 2016–March 2017). Although the ethnographic part of my research focused on Ziferblat, I also conducted a number of supplementary observations in other anti-cafes and interviewed one anti-cafe owner to contextualise my case study. However, as I proceeded with the physical fieldwork and analysis, this research has been reshaped into a case study of placemaking in a specific social and cultural context, rather than a case study of the anti-cafe as a new form of public place. By structuring my discussion around the three key themes—placemaking, the post-functional city and the post-digital city—I linked the research findings with theoretical concepts that have been emerging over the course of analysis. As a result of this focus shift, this thesis incorporated only a very limited part of my ethnographic and media research on non-Ziferblat anti-cafes, albeit I am hoping to get back to this data in further publications.

Thus, my research questions were finalised as follows:

1. Why did such an initiative emerge in Russia and what made it popular in a global context? How is the global/local dialectic negotiated within Ziferblat franchise?
2. How was the idea of Ziferblat constructed and what is the ultimate goal of this placemaking project?
3. Who are the key agents of placemaking in Ziferblat and what are the power relations between them? How do the social and the spatial interplay in the process of making Ziferblat?
4. How does Ziferblat mix different functions in one space and what opportunities and challenges arise from this approach to placemaking?

5. How does post-digital culture manifest itself in Ziferblat? How does the presence of ICT affect sociability and community in this place?

6. What are the outcomes of this social experiment? Is Ziferblat capable of making social change?

2.2. Media analysis, observations, interviews, and things in-between: conducting the research

2.2.1. Media analysis. Or post-digital ethnography?

The vast majority of empirical research on third places is based on observation and interviewing or, more often, their combination (Germain, 2001; Thompson and Arsel, 2004; Laurier, 2005; Rosenbaum et al. 2007; Hall, 2009; Tjora and Scambler, 2013; Jones et al., 2015; Henriksen and Tjora, 2018). Following this fruitful tradition, I nevertheless decided to combine it with another method, not particularly common in this field—media analysis. At the beginning stage, I analysed various Russian- and English-language media texts on anti-cafes in general and Ziferblat in particular, including their websites and social media accounts (Facebook, Vkontakte,¹² Instagram, Twitter), press reports and interviews, and user-generated reviews on TripAdvisor, Yelp and Google Maps. After identifying some general tendencies in this area, I proceeded with a closer media research on Ziferblat and its ancestor, Treehouse. Upon completion in June 2016, this core phase of media analysis was complemented with the follow-up monitoring of Pokrovka, Tverskaya, Old Street and Edge Street websites and social media accounts and Ziferblat's appearances in English- and Russian-language news and opinion articles. The number of publications analysed during the core phase is 233, plus three multi-entry sources: Treehouse Vkontakte group, Mitin's public blog on LiveJournal,¹³ and *Tretie Mesto* ('Third Place'), a Russian website that actively promoted the third place concept and catalogued Moscow's and Saint Petersburg's third places, including anti-cafes, in 2011–2013. The follow-up monitoring (July 2016–October 2017) added 115 more items to this dataset. Both numbers were determined by following the principle of saturation (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

Typically, even in those rare cases when media analysis is employed in third place studies (Kjeldgaard and Ostberg, 2007; Linnet, 2013; Broadway, 2018), it is treated as only an occasional supplement to ethnographic methods, whereas for the case study of

¹² Popular Russian social networking site.

¹³ Popular Russian blogging platform.

Ziferblat it was for a number of reasons no less essential than observations and interviews. Firstly, the analysis of media texts shed light on many structural and organisational aspects of this new urban phenomenon and the context of its appearance, thereby contributing to shaping the theory and providing me with a basis for further research. As a result, I came to the field with more specific questions, which, in turn, allowed me to capture some deeper social phenomena and relations within and outside particular branches. In addition, I often referred to the media representations of Ziferblat and other anti-cafes in my interviews with staff and guests, which allowed for less obtrusive questions. Secondly, media analysis revealed many details of the conceived Ziferblat and a multitude of ways in which this space is perceived, illuminating the complexity of the placemaking process. Thirdly, it provided information about some important sides of Ziferblat that I would not be able to access otherwise. Thus, by the time I started my physical fieldwork, Mitin was unavailable for interviews (he did not reply to my interview request, as, to quote other staff members in Moscow, *'He's sort of tired of Ziferblat'*), but I could use numerous media interviews and public blog posts where he discussed his vision of Ziferblat.

Apart from that, media analysis allowed me to explore Treehouse, which at some point drew my attention as a prototype for Ziferblat and therefore the whole anti-cafe culture. As it turned out, many essential elements of Ziferblat had been shaped in Treehouse through lively and sometimes heated debates between Mitin and his guests. Since this venue was closed in November 2014, I used Treehouse Vkontakte group (7403 members and 1463 entries over a period of 2010–2014) to reconstruct the history of this place through a thorough, entry-by-entry analysis of the discussions, narratives, photos and videos generated by the local community. This micro yet important case study within a wider case study of Ziferblat can also be qualified as retrospective remote ethnography. This methodological concept was coined by John Postill in response to the recent debates on whether researching local issues remotely and/or retrospectively (e.g. via Twitter, live streaming, web cam, email, online archives) is a legitimate mode of ethnographic enquiry. Briefly put, his answer is 'yes' (provided it is used ethically), as the development of ICT makes the key notion of ethnography, 'being there', more and more fuzzy, hence 'it is now gradually becoming rare for ethnographers not to use telematic media as part of their research repertoire' (Postill, 2017: 67). In my 2016–2017 interviews with staff members and guests of Pokrovka and Tverskaya branches—my two physical research sites in Moscow—I was lucky to collect some additional first-hand evidence about Treehouse from those who turned out to be its ex-patrons or hosts. Overall, the concept of remote retrospective ethnography seems a more adequate description of my approach than, for example, Kozinets's (2010) notion of 'netnography', which draws on rather rigid demarcation of the online

and offline realms. Thus, he uses this term in relation to the analysis of communities necessarily emerging from 'the net', whereas Treehouse V Kontakte group was a digital extension of a physical space. However, I did keep in mind that these online discussions do not fully represent the entire social reality of Treehouse.

The increasing blurriness of the idea of 'being there' has also been discussed in relation to the practicalities of global ethnography. As Gille and Ó Riain (2002: 287) point out,

The need to pursue actors through space and time in order to explore placemaking projects seems likely to increase our use of interviews, history, tracing networks, and so on and to decrease our time spent simply being on site. The classic model of extended stays in a site extends to multisited ethnography quite poorly—for the reasons we have discussed and also for the purely practical reasons of time and other resources (...). Place becomes a launching pad outward into networks, backward into history and ultimately into the politics of place itself.

Since I could not afford extended stays in Moscow, London and Manchester, the follow-up media monitoring of Pokrovka, Tverskaya, Old Street and Edge Street kept me on track during my absences from the field. However, due to the fact that Ziferblat is remarkably active online—each branch either has a dedicated social media manager or this job is split between several hosts posting on forthcoming and previous events or making mood-setting status updates every few days—my ethnography was becoming more and more 'blended' (Dyke, 2013). In her ethnography of pro-anorexia communities, where she was a participant observer in an offline eating disorder prevention project, also exploring the 'pro-ana' websites, Sarah Dyke introduced this term to describe the approach that is 'similarly attuned to both the actual and the virtual, without separating or prioritising one over the other' (p. 146). Her discussion of how the virtual was blending itself into her physical fieldwork, data collection, fieldnotes, and research diary illuminates many practical issues of doing a blended ethnography. Thus, she emphasised the importance of making accurate notes that reflect the connections between people, places, ideas and communities, as it traces the way the researcher arrived at a certain online space and therefore allows for greater reflexivity. I found this advice particularly useful at the stage when media monitoring went hand in hand with physical fieldwork, often making me feel overwhelmed with the amount of information I had to process. The extent to which the online blended itself in my physical ethnography of Ziferblat can be illustrated by the following two examples.

In one of my fieldtrips to Moscow (December 2016), I met Natalia who came to Pokrovka with the hope to catch up with her teenage son, as she knew that he spent most of his spare time there. In our interview, she shared her concern about this fact,

asking me if I found this place safe. This was an anxious time for Russian teenagers' parents indeed. Just one week before our talk, a friend of Natalia's son, an exemplary student from a functional middle-class family, died of a drug overdose at someone's home party; his mother's Facebook post about this was commented and reposted by tens of thousands of people across the country. At the very same moment, Russian media were alarming the public about the 'Blue Whale' suicide game circulating in social networking sites, which caused a massive wave of moral panic over 'youth in danger'. A couple of days later, I came across Natalia again, this time in Tverskaya, and as we started chatting, she showed me a Vkontakte post about Ziferblat, published by some radical Orthodox organisation; she said her son just had sent her a link to this post with a 'LOL' comment. In this post, parents were warned against Ziferblat, unequivocally called a '*psychocult*' that '*ruins traditional values*'¹⁴ and '*zombifies our children and youth*'. This bizarre piece of conspiracy theory was immediately reposted by the Pokrovka team; they also changed the subhead of Ziferblat's Vkontakte account to the enigmatic phrase '*Meditation, disguised as casual social events*', borrowed from that post. A few months later, they referred to this meme again by organising an event called '*The Cult's Dinner Party*'. It is remarkable how this self-ironic gesture attempted to reclaim rather than fight the stigma of cult, perpetuating the image of a liminal space, secluded from the public by insider jokes.¹⁵

Another insightful moment happened during my ethnography in the Old Street branch in London, when I noticed a host pulling out a vintage typewriter and then spending about half an hour trying to make it work. A few minutes after she finished, I saw a new post added to the Old Street Facebook account with a photo of this typewriter and a sheet of paper in it saying '*Creative Writers Meetup 17/01/2017. Join the group and let your creativity flow*' (figure 1). Fascinated with how much effort she put into making this announcement and how a pre-digital device was used to uphold the image of an 'authentic' space, I hesitated for a while, trying to decide whether I need to keep this in my 'physical' field notes or in the online diary—a document inspired by Dyke's recommendations, where I kept the record of publications arising in the follow-up media monitoring. It ended up in the former, as I saw the offline backstage of this online representation first, but not the other way around. Moments like that¹⁶ not only

¹⁴ Since the Pussy Riot trial in 2012, 'traditional values' have become one of the key pillars of the Russian neoconservatism. This ideological construct is based on the mixture of the Cold War rhetoric, patriotism, heteronormativity and pronatalism, commitment to Russian Orthodox Christianity, and rejection of 'decaying Western values', mostly interpreted as the 'obsession' with feminism and human (primarily LGBTQI+) rights, and an 'excessive tolerance' towards Muslim migrants. One can only guess what exactly made the authors of that post see Ziferblat as a threat to this ideology, but it is remarkable that they acknowledge the power of Ziferblat as a 'psychological warfare'.

¹⁵ Ziferblat's ideology of liminality will be discussed in more detail in chapter 4.

¹⁶ See also the discussion of a tea party in Pokrovka, p. 200.

provide some thought-provoking insights on the practicalities of doing blended—or, to adapt it to my theoretical framework, post-digital—ethnography, but also allow for a more critical perspective on placemaking.



Figure 1. Post-digital ethnography in a post-digital space.
A screenshot from Old Street Facebook account, February 2017

In his analysis of the construction of ‘cosiness’ in Danish coffeeshops, Linnet (2013: 16) touched upon this aspect, noting that ‘cases where managers take pictures of the crowd visiting the place, and post them online to build a reputation as a popular venue, e.g. in social media’, shed light on the process of co-production of the sense of place in third place servicescapes. Taking this observation further, I argue that contemporary third places, permeated with online connections and engaged in social media marketing practices, require a post-digital ethnographic approach, not only bringing online representations into focus but also linking them with the offline contexts behind (e.g. the typewriter post) and around (e.g. the ‘psychocult’ post) them.

Before concluding this subsection, I shall get back to the feeling of being overwhelmed with the breadth and depth of the data collected. In his discussion of the advantages and limitations of remote ethnography, Postill (2017: 64) reframes the well-known ethnographic problem of ‘leaving the field’ in the context of the proliferation of digital technologies. Referring to Patty Gray’s (2016) research where she unexpectedly resumed her previously physical fieldwork, following Russian 2011–2012 street protests via social media while being in Ireland (as it could not have been known that the first rally she visited in Moscow in December 2011 will be followed by many more), Postill does not suggest any solutions other than ‘channelling the deluge of information (...) by following a manageable set of informants’ (Postill, op. cit.: 65). Similarly, my physical ethnography of Ziferblat (approximately 160 hours between November 2015 and March 2017) was extended not only to the past—which, as Gille and Ó Riain (2002: 287) suggest, is typical for global ethnographies—but also to the future, as I did

not ‘unfollow’ Ziferblat’s Facebook pages (this would not help anyway, as my friends knowing about this research project and some participants with whom we kept in touch between and after my field trips would often update me on some remarkable publications or share their recent experiences in Ziferblat). Hence, my strategy of ‘border[ing] the virtual field’ (Dyke, 2013: 153) took a while to take shape. Although I did not discontinue the follow-up media monitoring immediately after completing the physical fieldwork in March 2017, I stopped adding new entries to the online diary as soon as I started the writing-up stage in October 2017.

2.2.2. Physical ethnography

2.2.2.1. Research sites

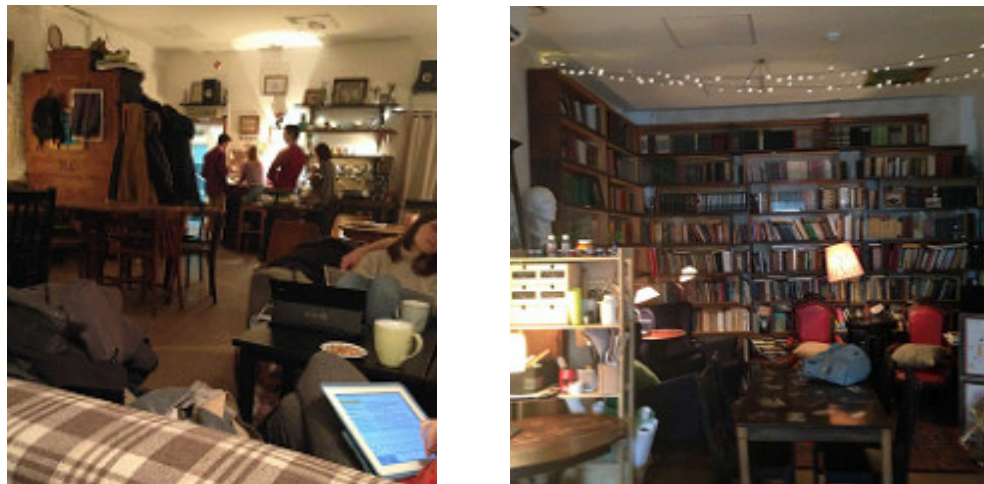
VENUE/ CHARACTERISTICS	Pokrovka	Tverskaya	Old Street	Edge Street
Location	Moscow	Moscow	London	Manchester
Owner	Ziferblat Worldwide	Ziferblat Worldwide	Ziferblat Worldwide	Ziferblat UK & Ireland
Year opened	2011	2012	2014	2015
Floor space, m ²	99	238	90	560
Price in GBP, as of September 2018	£4.15 for 2 hours, ¹⁷ £6.92 for 4 hours, then free		£4.20 for 1 hour, £6.60 for 2 hours, £9.00 for 3 hours; £11.40 price cap after 4 hours	£4.80 for 1 hour, £19.20 price cap after 4 hours
Opening times	Sun–Thu 10 a.m.–0.00; Fri–Sat 10–6 a.m.	Mon–Sun 10 a.m.–0.00	Mon–Fri 10 a.m.–11 p.m. Sat–Sun 12–11 p.m.	Mon–Fri 8 a.m.–10 p.m. Sat–Sun 10 a.m.–10 p.m.

Table 1. Comparative characteristics of four Ziferblats

Before I proceed with a detailed discussion of physical ethnography in four Ziferblat branches, I will give a brief snapshot of their location, spatial layout and price policy (table 1), and organisational structure. As single photos are not particularly illustrative in this case, I selected four short YouTube videos made by guests and staff that provide a better understanding of how Pokrovka (Ziferblat, 2015b), Tverskaya (Claire, 2016), Old Street (Saad, 2016) and Edge Street (Ziferblat Edge Street, 2015) look.

¹⁷ These 1-2 hour slots were specified by local teams only for calculation purposes. In reality, one can spend as little time in any Ziferblat as they want.

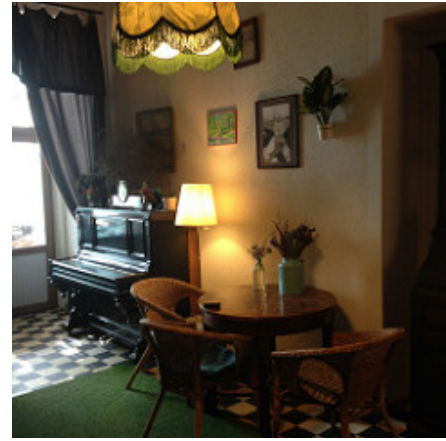
Pokrovka branch (figures 1.1 and 1.2), the very first Ziferblat in the world, opened in 2011, is located in the historical centre of Moscow, in a first-floor¹⁸ commercial property in a lively street dominated by cafes, bars and small shops, with plenty of foot and some car traffic. Other businesses located in this building include a grocery shop, a cafe, a nail salon, and a number of offices. Some of them face the street, others, including Ziferblat, are accessible through a courtyard. The venue (99 m²) consists of two adjoining rooms. The bigger one (71 m²) is used as a main space; the smaller one, called 'the library' (28 m²), serves as a quiet zone and, sometimes, as an event space. New guests are checked in and out by a host sitting on the chair next to the entrance.



Figures 1.1 and 1.2. Pokrovka: main space and 'the library'
Photos taken by the author, July 2016

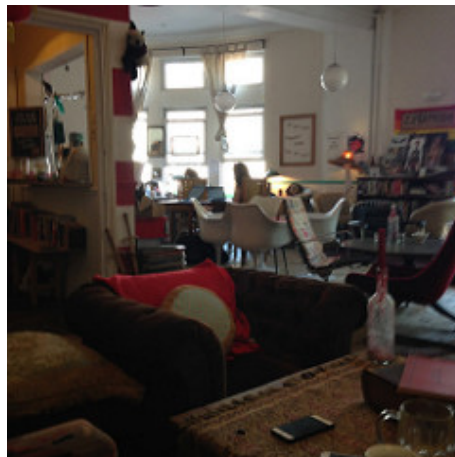
Another Moscow Ziferblat, Tverskaya (figures 2.1 and 2.2), is also located in a first-floor commercial property in the historical centre, but in a different kind of neighbourhood, as this street is anecdotally known to be 'the most expensive street in Moscow' (rent-wise). Food anthropologist Melissa Caldwell (2009: 101) accurately describes it as 'Moscow's central avenue [*it is indeed one of the key interchanges in the city centre—A.K.*] and the home of the most exclusive and glamorous shops' (for instance, one of Ziferblat's immediate neighbours is *Massimo Dutti* boutique). However, this neighbourhood is also known as the home of many historical attractions, museums and art colleges. Unlike Pokrovka, it is not conducive to flâneurie; although foot traffic is quite intense here, it is rather a car-dominated than pedestrian area. The venue is much larger than Pokrovka (238 m²) and much more divided; it has two floors and no main space, as it is comprised of eleven separate and walk-through rooms and a tiny hidden kitchen. In contrast to Pokrovka, in this branch guests are checked in and out at the coffeeshop-style counter.

¹⁸ Here and elsewhere in this thesis I use British English terminology for floors.



Figures 2.1 and 2.2. Tverskaya: counter and one of the rooms
Photos taken by the author, March 2017

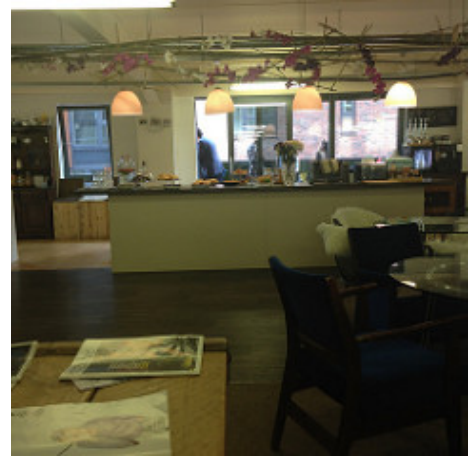
The smallest of all currently existing Ziferblats (90 m²), Old Street branch in Shoreditch (figures 3.1 and 3.2), London, located on the noisy corner of Old Street and Shoreditch High Street, consists of just one room (also enclosing a small space called ‘secret hide-away room’) and a separate kitchen. Newcomers are greeted by a host standing at the counter which is open from behind, so the back side of this counter faces the room.



Figures 3.1 and 3.2. Old Street: main space and kitchen
Photos taken by the author, July 2016

Edge Street branch (figures 4.1 and 4.2), located in the Northern Quarter in Manchester, is the most spacious of these four Ziferblats (560 m²). It is designed as a half-and-half combination of a huge common area called ‘the sitting room’ (which includes back-to-the wall reception desk and large open kitchen) and four smaller meeting rooms at the back, available on a hire basis.¹⁹

¹⁹ For this reason, I did not do any research on Edge Street meeting rooms.



Figures 4.1 and 4.2. Edge Street: main space and kitchen
Photos taken by the author, February 2017

In terms of organisation, both Moscow branches and Old Street in London belong to and are coordinated by the Russia-based company called *Ziferblat Worldwide* (it used to be run by Mitin until 2015). The Old Street team does not include any Russian-speaking staff, except for the branch manager; it has not been visited by Mitin since 2014 due to the visa issues (see his interview in: Pinayev, 2014). Edge Street belongs to the local company called *Ziferblat UK & Ireland* (ZUKI), which, in turns, belongs to the Shenton Group (see p. 13). Although Mitin provided some guidelines to the ZUKI team before and shortly after the opening, neither he nor *Ziferblat Worldwide* in general have any say in their policies as long as they do not violate the licence agreement (which will be discussed in more detail in chapter 6). Each branch has a manager and a number of hosts; altogether, they will be referred to as 'teams' or 'staff'. In some contexts, I will be using the word 'staff' as a wider description including branch managers and the founder (as opposed to guests); however, in those cases where the difference between hosts, managers, and the founder is meaningful, these roles will be distinguished.

2.2.2.2. Participant observations

The physical ethnography of *Ziferblat* started with a few exploratory fieldtrips to Old Street in November 2015 and April 2016, followed by a more intensive fieldwork carried out in Pokrovka (July and December 2016), Tverskaya (December 2016 and March 2017), Old Street (February 2017, plus a number of trips between July and November 2016), and Edge Street (one exploratory trip in August 2016 and a series of trips in February–March 2017). In sum, I spent no less than 30 hours in each location (the number of hours spent in Old Street was more than twice that, as London was the most easily accessible destination). Given that the question 'How much is enough?' does not have a universal answer (Mason, 2010), I relied on the existing third place ethnographies, where the number of hours spent by a solo researcher in one venue

ranges from 30 (Tjora, 2013) to 100 (Germain, 2001). However, the latter study was a single-site observation, whereas Tjora's research was conducted in four cafes in Australia, Norway, and the US, which is quite similar to my research design. Apart from that, the frequency of visits and the length of stay were largely determined by time and financial resources. For instance, the peak season of Ziferblat attendance overlapped with Warwick term time (October–December and February–March) and therefore conflicted with my teaching responsibilities, so I could carve only 5–7 days during a reading week or vacation for intensive fieldwork. Furthermore, due to the budget limitations, I could not afford accommodation in London and Manchester, as my Moscow trips were already expensive enough, so the UK part of fieldwork was structured as day trips.

Despite this limitation, such short recurrent visits turned out to be advantageous at least in two respects. First, it allowed me to trace the development of personal stories shared by the participants. Thus, in December 2016 I interviewed two friends and very loyal guests of Pokrovka, Pyotr and Roman; Pyotr mentioned that he would like to apply for a job in Ziferblat at some point. Four months later in Tverskaya, I bumped into Roman and we had a chat—it turned out that Pyotr had finally fulfilled his dream. I also remember a mutually pleasant feeling of meeting a familiar person in a place that is crowded with strangers, which brings me to my second point: such fieldwork structure allowed me to explore the power of Ziferblat's 'subtle ties' (Tjora, 2013), easily producing the sense of attachment, belonging and community, as will be discussed in more detail in chapter 7. This observation raises the issue of researcher's attachment to the field, widely discussed in ethnographies based on long-term immersion (e.g., Venkatesh, 2008) but almost completely ignored in third place studies (except for the above-mentioned Tjora's research), and echoes the arguments of those challenging the traditional understanding of 'immersion' and 'being there' in the context of global and post-digital ethnography (Gille and Ó Riain, 2002; Postill, 2017).

Although in this section—for the sake of structuring the discussion—I framed participant observations and interviews as two elements of physical ethnography, in reality the relationship between ethnography and observations in my fieldwork was not so clear. Nor is it simple in theory; for instance, Forsey (2010) unravels the 'myth of participant observation', arguing that only a very little part of ethnographic fieldwork is observing (as opposed to talking and especially listening). In my fieldnotes, I commented on some 'thick' moments of interaction that could not be labelled as observation (even if participant), as they felt like '*real ethnography*'. There was also a funny moment in November 2015 in Old Street, on my very second day of Ziferblat fieldwork (and ethnographic fieldwork overall, as I had not had any previous research

experience alongside media analysis), when I was frantically taking notes in fear of missing something important and by so doing missed something important indeed—other guests sitting next to me and trying to make friendly eye contact, kitchen small talks that produce many subtle ties in Ziferblat, and so on. At the end of that day, I made a revelatory comment in my fieldnotes: *‘Looks like I should take notes retrospectively—this branch makes you constantly interact with people’*. Whereas Old Street and both Moscow branches, especially Pokrovka, often challenged the textbook distinction between participant observation and ethnography, my fieldwork in Edge Street was very clearly the former and never the latter. In chapter 7, I will discuss in more detail how different branches produce different levels of sociability. Apart from that, Ziferblat’s conviviality made many informal conversations smoothly transform into semi-structured interviews, thereby dissolving the boundary between participant observation and interviewing.

It was anticipated in the beginning that at some point I might volunteer or apply for a temporary job in some Ziferblat to obtain an insider perspective, as such studies are quite rare in the third place research (for an exception, see Laurier, 2013a). However, after some reflection I realised that I was more interested in a standpoint of a newcomer who gradually becomes a regular. Therefore, my insider/outsider status in Ziferblat was quite fluid—I was an outsider for staff members and the most seasoned regulars but some other newcomers perceived me as an insider, i.e. not a staff member but someone who knows Ziferblat well (see, e.g., Natalia’s question about safety, p. 42). In the next subsection, I will discuss how this standpoint affected the interview recruitment process.

Being an outsider not only in Ziferblats but also in all three cities where the research was conducted (less so in Moscow, as I have many friends there), I decided to utilise the extended place method (Duneier, 1999: 344) and supplemented my Ziferblat fieldwork by an additional 16 hours spent in two other Ziferblat branches (Liverpool and Saint Petersburg) and nine non-Ziferblat venues in Moscow (six anti-cafes and one library), London (one laptop-friendly cafe/cultural centre), Manchester (one laptop-friendly cafe, very briefly). Not only did it put the case study of Ziferblat into a wider context of local third place cultures but it also provided some useful interview props. Moreover, some of these places were mentioned to me by the participants (*‘You should see this’* or *‘This is similar to Ziferblat’*), which further blurred the line between interviews and ethnography.

2.2.2.3. Semi-structured interviews

Typically, I allowed at least a couple of days of observations in every new branch before proceeding with the interviewing. In total, I conducted 16 staff and 32 guest semi-structured recorded interviews in four Ziferblats (with an approximately even distribution of participants between branches) and one additional interview with a non-Ziferblat anti-cafe owner in Moscow, who shared his thoughts regarding the history and current state of the anti-cafe market in Russia and his own experience of running an anti-cafe. On eight occasions, I interviewed guests who were with company (one or two companions), so the total number of interview participants is 57.

In Ziferblat, the staff sample consisted of hosts, branch managers, and chief officers; the guest sample included newcomers, regulars and volunteers (Appendix A). Volunteer scheme in Ziferblat involves running some errands, getting free minutes in return; this status will be discussed in further chapters. Apart from that, I described some guests in Pokrovka and Tverskaya as 'locals' due to their special status as, so to speak, friends of Ziferblat (which is more than just being regulars). The age of guest participants ranged from 16 to 72 years and their occupation was quite diverse (students and teachers, office and self-employed workers, freelancers, creative professionals, IT specialists and engineers, social and charity workers, unemployed people); 68% of them were female and 32% male. Due to the nature of doing research in a public place, sampling was largely dependent on circumstances. My primary concern was to represent both newcomers and regulars and give voice to people of different ages. I was less focused on volunteers, as during my physical fieldwork this practice was under reconsideration in all branches (in Edge Street, there were no volunteers at all). Another criterion was saturation—thus, I interviewed more staff members in Old Street, as their individual visions of Ziferblat turned out to be more unique than those of Moscow and Manchester teams. Staff interviews were typically longer (16 to 200 minutes, 102 minutes on average) than those of guests (6 to 79 minutes, 28 minutes on average). Interview guides are included in Appendix B.

All interviews were conducted in Ziferblat, although the option of meeting elsewhere was always offered; nevertheless, everyone preferred to stay on site. Whereas all guest interviews were spontaneous, all staff interviews were scheduled beforehand. Initially, staff members were approached in person or via email. Notably, the very process of staff recruitment and interviewing revealed some important inter-branch differences. While in Moscow and London branches I interviewed hosts first and then branch managers, Edge Street suggested a more hierarchical structure, as all my communication with the team was not only coordinated by their marketing officer but

also went in a top-bottom direction. Many hosts in Moscow and London chose to be interviewed during their shifts, which resulted in many interruptions. However, this should not be seen as a pure limitation, as such interruptions provided us both with some recovery breaks. More importantly, I was able to observe the hosts doing their job and then discuss it with them immediately, which largely deepened my understanding of Ziferblat routines. On a number of occasions in Moscow, some regulars and locals voluntarily joined staff interviews, making comments (e.g. *'Right, I remember that'*) or just listening actively, demonstrating their feeling of ownership of Ziferblat and participation in its history.

In contrast to these pre-scheduled interviews with staff members, guests interviews were much trickier in terms of recruitment, as I had to approach and interview them there and then. As Henriksen and Tjora (2018) point out, timing is crucial for spontaneous interviews in a third place environment; thus, in their study on 'cafe worker species' they were observing potential participants long enough to identify natural breaks—'interaction slots'—in their activities. Spotting such slots in the multifunctional space of Ziferblat was even more complicated, as the range of guests' activities was wider than in a cafe. On many occasions, a potential participant would leave the venue in that exact moment when I was going to recruit them.

Another issue, rarely discussed in ethnographic studies, was what Scott et al. (2012) called 'shyness in the field'. Although the idea of the anti-cafe in principle normalises spontaneous contacts between strangers, sometimes I felt incredibly uncomfortable about approaching other guests and asking them for an interview. As it turned out, my level of confidence while recruiting guest participants was largely dependent on the branch, to which I will return in more detail in chapter 7. However, this uncomfortable feeling allowed for a more reflexive interpretation of the issues of sociability and conviviality in places like Ziferblat.

Another insightful aspect of this experience was my eventual adoption of some typical icebreakers used by Ziferblat staff and guests for striking up a conversation with a stranger. Some of these tactics I figured out intuitively or through observations, others were shared with me in staff and guest interviews, but, most importantly, I had a chance to test them immediately to see how they work. This part of my fieldwork might also be considered as what Tjora (2013: 110) called soft-experimental auto-ethnography in a third place. As mentioned before, I explored Ziferblat from a standpoint of a newcomer who arrives to an unfamiliar venue on her own, experiencing what it is like to approach and be approached by strangers in such spaces. Over the course of my fieldwork, I have been embracing different strategies, sometimes actively

initiating contacts, other times just passively signalling that I am open for a contact, and, on some occasions, deliberately avoiding any contacts, which helped to distinguish some universal factors that shape sociability in Ziferblat. One of the most powerful strategies was asking staff for assistance, or just accepting their help, as many of them (especially in Moscow) were very proactive in their attempts to introduce me to specific regulars and locals who they found appropriate speakers on Ziferblat. Although I was very lucky to have such cooperative gatekeepers, I had to ignore many suggestions in order to stick to the chosen standpoint, as I did not want this research to turn into a study of local 'crowds'.

Getting back to the relationship between interviews and participant observation, the latter turned out to be an efficient instrument of fact checking—in a curiously positivist sense. Thus, once I sat at a table with a Tverskaya volunteer who was saying (in response to my question '*What kind of people go to Ziferblat?*') that Ziferblat is a place for creative youth, while two middle-age men wearing business casual were discussing cargo operations arrangements at arm's length from us. It was at this point when I realised that this question (which I have been chasing for months, mostly getting answers like that cited above, or just '*Pretty much everyone*') can never be answered due to the methodological limitations of qualitative research. Although some tendency can be drawn from the cross-check of the data collected through media analysis, observations and interviews (it seems indeed that the core clientele of Ziferblat are the young and the creative, albeit Tverskaya and especially Edge Street audiences are much more diverse than those of Pokrovka and Old Street), I found it more useful to ask myself what kind of people *do not* go to Ziferblat, which brings us back to the discussion of the barriers to social engagement in third places, outlined in chapter 1.

2.2.3. Ethics

This research drew on the ethical guidelines of the British Sociological Association and the Warwick Research Code of Practice. Although all interviewees agreed to be referred to by their real names in their informed consent forms (I also offered such alternative options as pseudonymisation and anonymisation), I changed all names to protect their privacy. This, however, would have been difficult in the case of public speakers on Ziferblat—Ivan Mitin, his partner Indira Alymkulova, ZUKI COO Gareth Harold and ZUKI CMO Ben Davis, whose names remained unchanged.

Obtaining informed consent would have been more problematic within the framework of participant observations, but such unannounced observations are generally seen as acceptable for a public place ethnography (Germain, 2001; Henriksen and Tjora, 2018), as long as they are noninterventionist and harmless for participants (Denzin and

Erikson, 1980). However, Ziferblat's increased level of conviviality—as compared to regular cafes—made me rethink this seemingly simple rule and approach it in a more sensitive and reflexive way. Thus, keeping in mind the observer effect, I did not plan to reveal the fact of doing research before the beginning of actual interviewing, after which it would hardly have been possible to disguise my identity as a researcher any longer. But given how many informal talks happened to me outside the interview framework, I reconsidered this rule and became fully open about the purposes of my visits. This honesty paid back by speeding up the process of interview recruitment but raised another challenge of setting the boundary between an informal talk and a recorded interview (in a way, this boundary was symbolically re-established with the appearance of the consent form and the recorder on the table). Conversely, I turned off the recorder in the moments when an 'official' interview transformed back into an informal conversation—on a couple of occasions, some guests started sharing personal stories that were not related to their Ziferblat experience. I also turned it off during the moments of interruptions in staff interviews, as the people who they were talking to (other guests or hosts) might not have noticed the recorder.

The issue of informed consent and the blurred boundaries between informal and recorded interactions also arose in the mediated part of my research. All media sources cited in this thesis were intended for public access; the only exception was the private post published by an Old Street host with whom we became 'friends' on Facebook, as we share some academic interests outside Ziferblat. Due to the social and political significance of the topic brought up in that post, it will be mentioned in chapter 7 with the kind permission of the author. Online discussions in Treehouse and Ziferblat social media groups are cited with no direct links and with all users (apart from Mitin) anonymised.

Taking into account the focus of this research on the issues of power, I tried to make sure that my interviews with staff and guests did not disrupt their activities and nobody felt forced to participate. Thus, I interviewed most staff members in the summer time when the venues were less crowded and thoroughly identified interaction slots in guests' activities (the fact that I got only one refusal—from an Edge Street guest who said she had to finish some urgent work—suggests that this strategy was efficient). Notably, both staff and guests sometimes reversed the power dynamic, seeing my research as beneficial for them. For instance, the Edge Street team repeatedly expressed interest in seeing my research findings when they become available and offered their help in organising a focus group interview with their guests (which I did not find appropriate for this study, as it crossed the border with marketing research). One guest, also in Edge Street, approached me after the interview and specifically asked

me to let the managers know that *'the place is very nice but the coffee is terrible'*. After the end of my fieldwork in Old Street I was emailed by a host asking if I can send them the ethics form again, so that another student doing her research on Ziferblat could use it as an example. The latter episode, in a way echoing Neal et al.'s (2015) discussion of over-researched places (including Hackney), brings us back to Mitin's unwillingness to give yet another interview—precisely because Ziferblat, at least in Russian context, was 'over-reported', which, arguably, could have been addressed with a clearer demarcation between journalistic and sociological interview.

Finally, keeping in mind that researched places are commercial establishments, I tried to avoid touching upon sensitive topics of that kind. The Old Street team, nevertheless, was very open about their financial struggles (not only with me but also with guests—see p. 147). There was another situation, sensitive in two ways, as it concerned the issues of homophobia and the organisational tensions between Old Street and Ziferblat Worldwide (p. 206), but I was assured by the interviewees that they told me exactly the same things they had already said to their Russian managers. As Gille and Ó Riain (2002: 290) point out, it should be kept in mind that global ethnographers, as long as they have 'many connections across multiple cliques, [are] likely to become a potentially valuable resource for other within the network—as well as potentially dangerous figure who knows too much'.

2.2.4. Data analysis and presentation

The collected data were analysed through NVivo software, the limited technical capacity of which became unexpectedly beneficial for the research process, as I had to create two separate projects—one for the intensive stage of media analysis and another one for the interview transcripts, fieldnotes, and online diary. As a result, upon completion of the physical fieldwork the coding system was restructured in an inductive way instead of cramming new findings into the old coding system.

The analysis of the data drew on an integrated model of discourse analysis, where discourse is broadly defined as any practice by which individuals imbue reality with meaning (Ruiz Ruiz, 2009: 3). In this model discourse analysis is understood as an umbrella methodology that covers various research techniques including content analysis; structural and formal semiotic analysis; analysis of discourse positions; frame analysis; conversation analysis; intertextual analysis; critical discourse analysis; inductive and abductive inference. It is sometimes difficult to identify the boundaries between these techniques when it comes to the actual process of analysis, but this research mostly utilised frame analysis, including the analysis of metaphors (Goffman,

[1974] 1986; Minsky, 1975; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980), as it seems especially fruitful for the studies of post-functionalist spaces.

Apart from that, section 3.3 in the following chapter employed a biographical analysis approach, exploring 'life experiences rooted in historical context' (Kaplan, 2014: 49). Drawing on Mitin's multiple media interviews and publications, I will address the lack of research linking placemaking projects with placemakers' biographies, situated in specific historical and cultural contexts.

All Russian-language sources cited in this thesis, including media publications, interview excerpts, and my own fieldnotes, were translated into English by myself as accurately as possible.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the methodological foundations of the study. The research theme, arising from my everyday experience and academic background, has gradually developed from a regional study on the new urban culture in Russia to a more focused inductively driven paradigmatic/unique, single/multiple, global-ethnographic case study of Ziferblat as an example of the anti-cafe, and finally to a more specific and theoretically-informed interpretive case study of Ziferblat as an example of placemaking in the post-functionalist and post-digital city. The constructivist-interpretivist orientation of this research determined its repertoire of methods.

The research began with the media analysis, which provided many insights but also blended itself in the ethnographic part of the study, provoking the methodological discussion on the similarities and differences between netnography (Kozinets, 2010), blended ethnography (Dyke, 2013), and remote ethnography (Postill, 2017). Drawing on their discussion of ontological, epistemological, ethical and practical issues of doing global ethnography in the mediated world, accompanied by the 'lightbulb moments' from my own fieldwork, I argue that contemporary third places, permeated with online connections and engaged in social media marketing practices, require a post-digital ethnographic approach, not only bringing online representations into focus but also linking them with the offline contexts behind and around them.

The next stage, participant observations (soon followed by and then overlapped with semi-structured interviews), revealed how some limitations of doing a multi-site third place ethnography transform into benefits. It also contributed to the emerging discussion on the issues of researcher's attachment in third place studies (Tjora, 2013), arguing that such notions as 'immersion' and 'being there' should be

reconceptualised in the context of global and post-digital ethnography. This discussion also addressed the well-known taxonomic problem of the relationship between ethnography and participant observations, interpreting the difference between them in relation to how sociability levels vary in different Ziferblats. I have also explained my standpoint as a newcomer-becoming-regular and discussed the fluidity of my insider/outsider status in this ethnography.

The final stage, semi-structured interviews, illuminated some aspects of the organisational structure within particular branches and brought into focus the issue of researcher's social confidence in relation to spontaneous interviews in the public realm. Although recruiting strangers there and then does not always feel comfortable, this challenge provides a valuable first-hand perspective on the issues of sociability and conviviality in the third place. Thus, I have discussed how I mitigated this discomfort through adopting some icebreaking props from staff and other guests. Apart from that, Ziferblat interviews raised a classic sociological question about the relationships between facts and representations, thereby reminding me not to ask positivist questions, unanswerable within the chosen methodological framework.

The concluding subsections have discussed some ethical issues arising from Ziferblat's increased conviviality, global geography and 'over-reportedness', and the instruments of data analysis—NVivo software, various discourse analysis techniques, and the biographical analysis of Mitin's media interviews and publications, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 3. Why there, why then? The historical and cultural context of Ziferblat's appearance

This chapter provides a detailed look into the historical and cultural context of Ziferblat's appearance in Russia. Sections 3.1 and 3.2 outline the history of placemaking in pre-revolutionary, Soviet, post-Soviet and modern times, shedding light on how different forms of public place have been changing their social and cultural role over the course of centuries and who were the agents of power behind these transformations. Although the full history of Russian placemaking is yet to be written, this chapter aims to address many gaps. Not only is it the first attempt to approach Russian public places with an integrative analytical framework, focusing on the history of placemaking rather than the history of a specific socio-spatial form (e.g. cafes), but it also seeks to go beyond the Soviet period, dominating in the relevant literature, and highlights such under-researched areas as pre-revolutionary, post-Soviet and especially modern urban culture in Russia. Section 3.3, using a biographical lens on placemaking, analyses the impact of Mitin's life history on Ziferblat. Overall, this chapter seeks to explain what factors allowed for such a form of public place to emerge and become popular in the 2010s Russia.

3.1. Placemaking in Tsarist and Soviet Russia

3.1.1. Public places in pre-revolutionary Russia

Unlike the case with the Soviet period, pre-revolutionary Russian spaces of socialisation and leisure have not been specifically addressed in the literature, which may be explained by two reasons. First, as follows from more general studies on the culture of the Russian aristocracy (Lotman, [1992] 2009; Lotman, 1994; Paliy, 2008) and the history of Russian cafes, restaurants and drinking venues (Kurukin and Nikulina, 2007; Volkova, 2009), as well as some secondary sources (Brockhaus and Efron, n.d.), the system of social spaces in Tsarist Russia was not significantly different from that of Europe. Russian analogues of taverns, inns, alehouses and pubs were *korchmy* (the 11th–16th century), *kabaki* (from the 16th century until the 1920s) and *traktiry* (from the 18th century until the 1920s). First restaurants, followed by cafes, appeared in Russian cities²⁰ in the early and mid-19th century, respectively; in a couple of decades, many of them turned into bohemian hubs, inspired by European literary cafes (Fitch, 1989; Rittner et al., 2013) or, in some cases, explicitly emulating them (Manning, 2013). Aristocratic salons played the same role in the development of the

²⁰ As is the case with many other phenomena, the historiography of pre-revolutionary public life in Russia is dominated by Saint Petersburg and Moscow.

social and cultural life of the Russian educated class in the 18th–19th century as they did for the European upper class (Habermas, [1962] 1989). Similarly to Europe, churches and markets (Sennett, 1974) were important spaces of socialisation for the lower and middle class strata, both in urban and rural areas. The only kind of public place that was notably absent from the Russian social and cultural landscape, as opposed to the European one, was the coffeehouse. Although coffee made a relatively successful entry to the Russian market in the 18th–19th century, it was mostly consumed at home, and overall it was always second to tea. There were a few coffeehouses operating in Saint Petersburg and Moscow, but they did not play such a distinct role in the development of Russian society as they did in Europe, especially in Britain (Habermas, *op. cit.*; Sennett, *op. cit.*; Cowan, 2005).

Second, none of the above-listed spatial forms survived the 1917 revolution,²¹ which makes it difficult to use them as a lens on Russian history, society and culture. However, a few more things must be noted about this period. Back in the 16th century, state-owned kabaki were established as a replacement for privately owned korchmy; run by selected members of the upper class, these new drinking venues were intended to maximise the state's revenue by selling alcoholic beverages to peasants and the urban lower and lower-middle class, whereas the middle-middle and upper-middle class and nobility spent most of their time at home.²² With the development of private trade in the 18th century, the middle class left alcohol-dominated kabaki to the less privileged strata and moved to privately owned traktiry, established by order of Peter the Great and serving food and both alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks (Kurukin and Nikulina, 2007). Not only did serfdom, poverty and the Tsarist autocracy create a giant social and cultural gap between the lower and the upper classes (which deepened even more after Peter the Great's reforms and the subsequent westernisation of the nobility's lifestyle in the 18th–19th century), but it also hampered the development of the middle class in Russia. Furthermore, since the 17th century, eavesdropping in public places was institutionalised as an instrument of Russian secret police (Zuckerman, 1996), which limited their potential for the production of the public sphere and civil society.²³ As a Croatian scholar and missionary Juraj Križanić noted in his 1641 report on the public life of Russian urban dwellers, 'there are kabaki and

²¹ The only exception is restaurants and cafes, though, as the next section will demonstrate, in the Soviet period their usage and role has changed.

²² Even those members of the nobility who, anachronistically speaking, were appointed to kabaki as managers, were not allowed to use them as customers, so that they would not mix up with the lower class public.

²³ This is another reason of the popularity of home salons among the aristocracy. Notably, all revolutionary groups in Russia—from the early 19th century Decemberists (Lotman, 1994) to the early 20th century Bolsheviks (Trotsky, [1930] 2018)—always gathered at home.

monopolies, restrictions and taxes, collectors and police informers everywhere, so people are disempowered all around and they can do nothing on their own free will' (Kurukin and Nikulina, op. cit.: 91). As follows from another document, His Imperial Majesty's Edict, 'kindly allowing' the establishing of the first cafe in Saint Petersburg in 1841 (Ibid.: 221), even two centuries later the principal agent of placemaking in Russia was the state.

The abolition of serfdom and the liberalisation of entrepreneurship²⁴ in 1861 encouraged the development, diversification and democratisation of Russian public places. Some aristocratic salons opened up for intelligentsia (Paliy, 2008), restaurants, cafes and *traktiry* became more affordable to the wider public (Kurukin and Nikulina, op. cit.: 223–224). Nevertheless, the system of public places was still largely stratified; thus, even *traktiry*—the most ubiquitous form of public catering, targeted at middle and lower classes—would rarely mix people of different strata in the same venue (Volkova, 2009: 13). For the most disadvantaged strata of Russian society, both in urban and rural areas, drinking in *kabaki* remained the only leisure option. Seeking to address this issue, local self-government councils and upper-class and intelligentsia philanthropists opened a number of 'people's houses'²⁵ in Russian cities and small towns. These prototypes of contemporary community centres typically served as library/school/non-alcoholic tearoom/performance hall for amateur theatre or choir (Pinalov et al., 1983). After the 1905 revolution, people's houses in working-class urban areas became the hotbed of Russia's fledgling trade union movement (Siegelbaum, 1999). Although it was an emergent rather than a large-scale movement, pre-revolutionary people's houses can be considered the first grassroots initiative in Russian placemaking.

3.1.2. Early Soviet period: the rise and fall of social condensers

In Soviet Russia, space became a key locus for the enactment of state policies and ideologies, which resulted in a massive recalibration of public and private spheres through the physical organisation and management of everyday life by the authorities (Caldwell, 2009: 107). When in the 1920s–1930s the politics of forced urbanisation and industrialisation brought millions of poverty-stricken peasants to the cities (primarily Moscow, the new Soviet capital), the overarching goal of these spatial policies was the creation of 'the new Soviet man'²⁶—a literate and civilised ('cultured') urban dweller, an

²⁴ Since 1861, any Russian citizen, regardless of his or her class belonging, was allowed to start an enterprise.

²⁵ This phenomenon is akin to Britain's people's palaces of the 1890s, also based on the ideas of temperance and enlightenment (Grafe, 2010).

²⁶ This is a literal translation of the Russian word *chelovek*, which is more gender-neutral than the English *man*.

efficient and ideologically correct ('politically educated') worker in good physical health and high spirits. As the architect and historian Anna Bokov (2017: 424) notes, this ambitious social engineering project did not aim to make a new individual—it was more of a construction of a new 'we', a collective entity composed of identical human units. In response to an unprecedented housing crisis in Moscow and the need to 'acculturate' its new dwellers, Soviet Constructivist architects came up with the concept of 'social condensers'—'new architectural organisms', designed as a physical expression of new social relations and intended to affect 'human psychology', thereby constructing 'the new life' (Ginzburg, [1927] 2017: 603). The idea of social condensers was put into practice in such experimental built forms as communal houses and workers' clubs. The former—densely populated apartment blocks with communal kitchens or no kitchens at all and a number of home services (e.g. laundry, childcare, canteen)—were intended to replace overcrowded communal apartments, dormitories and barracks, lacking basic facilities and conveniences, emancipate Soviet citizens from domestic labour, and, ultimately, eradicate the private domain. The latter was a new—and very different—version of pre-revolutionary people's houses, reframed as clubs (to reflect the new class hierarchy, as the word 'club' at that time was associated with aristocracy and bourgeoisie—just like 'palace', another object of linguistic appropriation that will be mentioned below).

In 1918, Nadezhda Krupskaya, one of the key figures in Soviet education policy, described her vision of workers' clubs in a way that strikingly resembles Oldenburg's theory of third places—excluding the ideological aspect (Krupskaya, [1918] 2014: 10–15). Addressing the issue of leisure as an integral feature of industrial society, she argues that workers, especially those who are new in the city and/or have not started a family yet, have a strong need for a 'social home'—or, as Oldenburg would have said, a home from home—where they would rest and recharge after work, have tea and dinner, and engage in various social and cultural activities without being burdened by the role of host or guest (cf. Oldenburg's principle of the 'neutral ground'). She emphasises a few important points: first, such clubs should be located close to workplaces so that workers would use them as a pit stop on their way home²⁷ (yet another parallel with Oldenburg); second, they cannot be narrowed down to a canteen or an assembly hall, even though both are important elements of the club (thus, she insists on a multi-functional approach); finally, there should be a good balance between political and cultural dimensions of 'enlightenment' (talks and discussions vs. film screenings, theatre performances, reading groups, music and drawing clubs) and an

²⁷ Which often was a long journey—along with the housing issues, the overpopulated Moscow suffered from the transport crisis.

opportunity to choose between collective and individual activities (clubs should have quiet rooms or at least nooks for those who want to spend some time alone).

Ironically, Krupskaya contrasted her seemingly democratic project with 'Tsarist' people's houses where, according to her interpretation, peasants were distracted from political struggle, lured into entertaining activities and, overall, had no say on how these spaces should have been used, whereas the new club 'should let a worker spend his or her time however they want' (Ibid.: 12). In reality, though, this project drew on her own, rather normative and idealised vision of workers and their needs.²⁸ Following up on the development of workers' clubs a few years later, she criticised them for engaging workers in entertainment, performance and sports, all of which lets them 'kill time' instead of 'having rest and [moral] satisfaction'; her other concern was the fact that most workers preferred informal gatherings in their barracks to 'state-of-the-art clubs' (Krupskaya, [1925] 2014: 108). Moreover, many workers' clubs, especially in provincial areas, were disrupted by disorderly behaviour and vandalism (Volkova, 2009: 152–153). In the late 1920s, Constructivists reinterpreted this new socio-spatial form within the 'social condenser' framework and built a number of enormous workers' clubs in Moscow and some other big cities across the USSR; such places were typically comprised of spacious foyer, multiple classrooms and recreation rooms, children's play room, gymnasium, dining hall, and giant auditorium (Bokov, 2017: 411). The striking contrast between these architectural utopias and their urban context— austerly, poor infrastructure, unresolved housing issues, street crime—made them gradually decline and eventually turn into 'paralysed condensers' (Ibid.: 430).

Another large project employing placemaking for social engineering was the Central Park of Culture and Leisure, opened in Moscow in 1928 and renamed after the Soviet writer Maxim Gorky in 1932.²⁹ Even though it was not explicitly framed as a social condenser, this project had exactly the same intention (Shaw, 2011). Constructed as an ambitious combination of landscape design and various built forms (museum, library, cinema, open-air stage, restaurant, children's play room, pond with boating facilities, and a variety of rides, intended for physical training rather than amusement), accompanied by cultural programming, Gorky Park attempted to erase the borderline between work and leisure, engaging its visitors in ideology-laden collective activities, which did not meet much enthusiasm on their side (Fitzpatrick, 1999; Kucher, 2007). As Katarina Kucher shows in her above-mentioned study, the real impact of Gorky

²⁸ E.g., 'there should be no gramophones in the dining hall because workers need quiet after work'; 'to engage those who are tired and do not want to talk, there should be art books and newspapers' (Ibid.).

²⁹ Although it kept its full name—Gorky Central Park of Culture and Leisure—to the present day, in academic literature, media and everyday life it is usually referred to as Gorky Park.

Park was quite different from the intended one, as it became a hotbed of the new Soviet culture of leisure and entertainment rather than ‘the new Soviet man’. Overall, by the end of the 1930s it became clear that social condensers, be it experiments in housing³⁰ or leisure, failed to achieve their goal; furthermore, the goal itself was no longer relevant, as the authorities’ attention shifted elsewhere (Shaw, op. cit.: 344).

3.1.3. Late socialism: back to the private

Despite all attempts of the Soviet state to eliminate the private domain, it expanded proportionately with economic growth and the improvement of housing conditions, especially after the Second World War (Kucher, op. cit.). Gorky Park turned into a regular urban park, comprised of amusement and recreation areas; in just a couple of decades, this spatial form was replicated in all Soviet cities (Shaw, op. cit.: 343). Workers’ clubs transformed into more modest—despite the term—‘palaces of culture’ (sometimes called ‘houses of culture’), serving as local cultural centres and offering various educational and entertainment activities (hobby clubs, concerts, dancing parties) to adults, young people and children living nearby; this form remained an integral part of the social life in Soviet cities till the end of the USSR (Yurchak, 2005). On a neighbourhood level, this function, downscaled to hobby clubs, was performed by housing committee clubs (Reid, 2014); their activities were mostly aimed at the youth and children (except for chess clubs, bringing together people of all ages). Apart from that, there was a national network of clubs—or, to translate it more literally, ‘houses’—based on professional rather than residential affiliation (e.g., Writers’ House). Unlike palaces/houses of culture, many of which were built into the infrastructure around industrial plants, such clubs were intended for certain strata within the intelligentsia — writers, artists, journalists, actors, musicians, academics, and teachers—and linked to their trade unions. In contrast to palaces/houses of culture where one, if lucky, would find only a small snack bar, these professional clubs had their own restaurants, accessible only for members (Volkova, 2009: 325); this privilege did not apply to teachers’ clubs, which reflected the status of this profession in the Soviet class structure, where ‘educated’ did not necessarily mean ‘affluent’ or otherwise privileged (Filtzer, 2014). These elitist spaces, segregating the officially employed (i.e. ideologically correct) creative workers from the underground ones and casting aside the non-creative and non-academic members of the Soviet educated class (doctors, engineers, librarians, etc.), are a rare example of a state’s placemaking initiative aimed specifically at the intelligentsia, otherwise ignored by Soviet urban planners.

³⁰ See, for example, Buchli, 2017; Willimott, 2017.

In summary, none of the above-mentioned spaces, except for the restaurants linked to the creative elites' professional clubs, were conducive to spontaneous and informal, rather than organised and surveilled, socialising. Palaces/houses of culture served as spaces for entertainment, leisure and cultural participation rather than centres of social interaction. Park leisure was intended for families, groups and couples, rather than solo visitors;³¹ squares and streets were perceived as the state's domain (Engel, 2006; Zhelnina, 2013), to which can be added that the old tradition of monitoring people's talks in public places reached dystopian levels in the Soviet period, especially in the Stalinist period (Fitzpatrick, *op. cit.*: 183).

As a result, sociability and conviviality moved into the private realm of home. After Khrushchev's housing reform in the early 1960s, millions of urban dwellers got access to non-communal apartments, which led to the rise of the 'kitchen culture' in the Soviet Union (Ries, 1997; Pesmen, 2000; Caldwell, 2009). Although it was a quantum leap from having to share kitchen and bathroom with up to 40 more people living in the same flat, space was still scarce, so living rooms transformed into extra bedrooms, while the social centre of the home moved to the kitchen, where people would spend long hours talking, eating and drinking with their friends. Many intelligentsia's kitchens served as artistic and/or intellectual salons welcoming guests beyond the immediate circle of friends (Boym, 1994: 147–148). Communal spaces within and around apartment blocks—vestibules, attics, basements, courtyards, playgrounds—were occupied by teenagers engaging in unsupervised activities, which caused several waves of moral panic about loitering, antisocial behaviour, substance abuse and youth crime, hence the development and promotion of hobby clubs (Pilkington, 1994). Speaking more widely, heavy drinking as a response to state violence and lack of political and economic participation permeated through all strata of the Soviet society (Kurukin and Nikulina, *op. cit.*: 455).

3.1.4. Soviet cafe culture: the suppressed sociality

Getting back to the restaurants attached to professional clubs, it must be noted that the Soviet system of public catering left very little space for informal sociality. Although the first post-revolutionary decade was marked by the rise of workplace canteens and public dining halls, promoted as an alternative to cooking and eating at home (Caldwell, *op. cit.*: 108), it was a case of coercive commensality enforced by the state as an instrument of totalitarian body politics, rather than an expression of Durkheimian solidarity (Watson, 2016). In principle, the function of the third place in its pure form—a

³¹ Furthermore, parks, especially in the evening hours, were always fraught with a certain amount of danger (Fitzpatrick, *op. cit.*: 53; Kucher, *op. cit.*: 271).

neutral, accessible and comfortable space not seeking to educate, indoctrinate and control its patrons—should have been performed by the cafe. However, the development of this cultural form in the Soviet Union was hindered by certain political and economic factors. After the revolution, cafes, restaurants and *traktiry* were nationalised along with the rest of the economy (Volkova, op. cit.: 86–87).³² Up until the 1960s, Soviet cafes were nothing but a more democratic version of restaurants; the latter, representing the upscale end of the public catering spectrum, were patronised by affluent customers, whereas most Soviet citizens visited restaurants only on very special occasions (Caldwell, op. cit.: 108).

One of the most distinctive features of the Khrushchev Thaw was the emergence of the so-called youth cafes (Volkova, op. cit.: 291), where coffee, light alcoholic drinks and a very modest food menu were merely a background for music, poetry and dance nights, lectures, public talks and intellectual discussions; their closest historical analogue is, perhaps, London's Formica cafes of the 1950s–1960s (Scambler, 2013: 71). As Volkova shows in the above-cited study, not only did the youth cafe movement rapidly spread across the whole USSR, but it also was to a large extent bottom-up. Although the final decision was always made by the authorities, the initiative was grassroots. In provincial cities, it took the form of a DIY and non-profit movement, as many enthusiasts opened such spaces in local palaces/houses of culture or housing committee clubs (in collaboration with their administrations) or even in their own homes. However, this social and cultural demand was never fully satisfied—in just a couple of years, the youth cafe movement was shut down, following the change in the political climate (Volkova, op. cit.: 333). It is no coincidence that one of the most popular Soviet TV shows of the 1960s–1970s, *Kabachok '13 Stuliev'* ('Cafe "13 Chairs"') told a story of a lively Polish cafe and its regulars—in reality, such a lifestyle remained a dream, as Soviet cafes were guided by the state's plan (each venue was supposed to feed a certain number of people per month) rather than commercial competition for loyal customers. This conveyor belt logic was reflected in their design, as most cafes were standing rather than sitting venues; the notorious rudeness of staff was another consequence. Nevertheless, these cramped, unwelcoming and

³² During the short period known as the New Economic Policy (1921–1928), when retail trade and small businesses were temporarily re-privatised, restaurant business came back to life (Volkova, op. cit.: 122–126). Interestingly, *traktiry*, despite their ubiquity and affordability, did not survive the subsequent re-nationalisation and transition to a centrally planned economy in the early 1930s—unlike cafes and restaurants, they disappeared for good, giving way to canteens. Although this phenomenon has never been addressed in the literature on Soviet food politics, it is highly likely that *traktiry* ceased to exist simply because they bore a stronger association with Tsarist Russia than cafes and restaurants, understood as an attribute of global urban modernity (Manning, 2013) and therefore perfectly fitting in with Stalinist consumerism (Dunham, 1976; Fitzpatrick, op. cit.) and the wider politics of socialist internationalism (Yurchak, op. cit.).

comfortless spaces served as small but important hubs of informal sociality of the 1970s–1980s—primarily for students, young professionals, and underground bohemia (Zdravomyslova, 1996; Paneiakh, 2000; Zdravomyslova, 2002; Volkova, op. cit.). On the one hand, this fact challenges the normative concept of third place, where physical comfort is mentioned among the key prerequisites of the architecture of sociability (Oldenburg, 1989; Kusiak and Kacperski, 2012: 221). On the other hand, it demonstrates the universality of third place as a cultural phenomenon finding its way through many political and economic obstacles.

3.2. Placemaking in post-Soviet and modern Russia

3.2.1. The 1990s: new hopes, new challenges

If in the Soviet Union placemaking was the prerogative of the state, using space as an instrument of social engineering, the collapse of what used (or at least pretended) to be a welfare state and a shockingly abrupt transition to neoliberal capitalism brought a new, profit-driven approach to the production of public places. The politics of privatisation changed the face of the old infrastructure of sociality: those few palaces/houses of culture and housing committee clubs that were not turned into retail and office spaces (Hatherley, 2017), suffered from physical decline and lost most of their audience—both adults, whose leisure time largely shrank, as they were struggling with the challenges of the new economy, and young people, who perceived them as the leftovers of the Soviet era that could no longer satisfy their new cultural demands. This transformation was captured in a popular joke, contrasting Soviet aeromodelling clubs with the nightclub as a new symbol of youth leisure: ‘Today, the phrase “A boy pulled³³ a model in a club” has a completely different meaning’. Another new meaning of the word ‘club’ in the post-Soviet context was the game club—typically a dark, dingy basement with rows of computer desks, occupied by teenagers and young people, predominantly males; in the 2000s, such clubs were reframed into internet cafes, though the scene did not change much (Kukleva, 2016).

Parks were no longer maintained properly; aesthetically, they reflected the turbulence of the period, as even the mother of all Soviet urban parks, Gorky Park, looked like an ‘odd mix of rickety American-style amusements, blaring pop music and Soviet monumental architecture’ (Shaw, 2011: 343). Those few restaurants and cafes that survived the privatisation of real estate were reoriented towards the nouveaux riches of the 1990s—businesspeople, gang members and those in-between, as hardly anyone

³³ The word *skleil*, used in the original Russian version of this joke, means both ‘put together’ (a mechanism, a puzzle) and ‘picked up/pulled’ (a girl).

else could afford dining out (Caldwell, op. cit.: 111). Furthermore, the cafe as the paramount element of the urban lifestyle—a neutral and comfortable public place, accessible to and affordable for a diverse variety of customers—had yet to appear in Russian cities. In her above-cited essay, Melissa Caldwell revisits her fieldwork in Moscow in the mid- and late 1990s, recalling how difficult it was to find appropriate public places to meet with her informants or catch up with her friends, so all appointments and get-togethers would typically take place in someone’s kitchen, office, or even on a public bench, with drinks and snacks purchased from one of the kiosks that occupied Russian streets after 1991 (Ibid.: 111–116).

The latter detail, as the urban sociologist Anna Zhelnina suggests, should not be interpreted as an evidence of the reduction of public space. Such an approach, perfectly justifiable in the critique of the late-capitalist city, is not completely applicable to the post-Soviet reality, as in Soviet cities ‘there was no public space in the form of lively interactive places in the central squares and streets, the space was not used as public (...); in the 1990s, however, people started using it by taking part in street retail’ (Zhelnina, 2013: 32). Nevertheless, this participation was neither joyful nor did it last long: in the 1990s, street trade was controlled by the gangs (Stephenson, 2015), by the 2000s, kiosks, stalls and small shops were mostly replaced by retail and catering chains (Caldwell, op. cit.).

Another remarkable change was the emergence of pedestrian streets in Russian cities, all of which explicitly copied Arbat Street in Moscow (Babina, 2012). Renovated and cleared of car traffic in 1986, Arbat became the embodiment of the cultural and economic changes of perestroika, as it brought together street artists, performers and crafters, selling their art to the public; youth subcultures, seeking for a ‘space of appearance’ (Arendt, 1958); and foreign tourists, exploring the other side of the Iron Curtain. Even though by the mid-1990s the cultural significance of this site decreased, in the early 2000s one would find a local ‘Arbat’ in every big city in Russia.³⁴ Unlike the replication of Gorky Park in Soviet urban planning, this placemaking initiative stemmed from the desire of provincial authorities to keep up with the capital city rather than the necessity to obey the federal directive. Although the social and cultural impact of these streets was limited by the severity of Russian climate and, overall, they were merely enclaves in the otherwise neither vibrant nor pedestrian-friendly cities of Russia, this

³⁴ Although most of these non-Moscow streets had their own historical and cultural identities, local authorities and media persistently called them ‘our Arbat’ (e.g. ‘Omsk’s Arbat’—Spartakovskaia Street in Omsk, ‘Chelyabinsk’s Arbat’—Kirovka Street in Chelyabinsk).

phenomenon marks the return of the state in placemaking and the appearance of the private investor as a new powerful agent of urban politics (Zhelnina, op. cit.).

3.2.2. The 2000s: new actors, new demands

By the end of the first post-Soviet decade, the first fast-food restaurants and coffeeshops appeared in Russian cities; in the early 2000s, some of them turned into national chains (Caldwell, op. cit.: 115), which coincided with (or, rather, resulted from) an unprecedented economic growth and the rise of the middle class in Russia (Patino, 2008). The geography of this new cafe culture, however, was still very uneven, as most of it concentrated in Moscow and Saint Petersburg. Although in a 2008 media publication, cited by Caldwell (op. cit.: 113), Moscow's coffeehouse scene is described as 'an already established' and the success of the two largest national chains, *Shokoladnitsa* and *Kofe Khauz*, is illustrated with quite impressive numbers (together, they had 340 branches across the country by that moment), in most Russian cities cafes had yet to become an element of everyday life. Not only did they represent a new consumer culture, very different from what Russians were used to—comfortable seating, magazines and newspapers, free wifi, and, most importantly, a large selection of tea and coffee³⁵—but they were still too expensive for many groups, including those typically associated with cafe culture—students, older adults, and the intelligentsia.

The intelligentsia, nevertheless, became both the subject and the object of commercial placemaking in the 2000s, even though the places opened by or for them were still scarce. Those who had enough resources—typically, the descendants of the Moscow's Soviet elite—opened their own clubs, which were very different from a typical Russian nightclub of the 1990s–2000s. Instead of drug-fuelled rave parties, these new clubs—*Project O.G.I.* (1999), *Apshu* (2003), *Kvartira 44* (2006), *Masterskaia* (2008)—offered live music, theatre performances, book presentations, public talks, poetry nights, homely design, dominated by vintage furniture and books, and the atmosphere of a friendly get-together with alcohol and board games. The conviviality of these venues was the result of their cliquishness, as they were aimed at a very specific group—journalists, media workers, writers, bohemians, all in their 30s–40s. Home—or, rather, a Soviet kitchen salon—was the key reference for these clubs: the very first of them, *Project O.G.I.*, initially was opened by a music producer Dmitry Borisov in his parents' apartment located in the historical centre of Moscow; his other club, *Apshu*, albeit operating as a public place during the day, had a private access in the evenings—a number of approved guests were given a key and allowed to bring as many friends as

³⁵ The former, one of the cornerstones of Russian culture, has always been associated with home; the latter, also typically consumed at home, in Soviet times was popular only among the intelligentsia.

they wanted or even organise their own events (Borisov, 2015). In a couple of years, Borisov opened a few cafes aimed at the same demographic and intended not only for dining and drinking but also for socialising. In addition, Project O.G.I. and Apshu worked as small publishing houses.

Books were also the centerpiece of another placemaking trend—hybrid venues. In Moscow, *Bilingva* (2003), *Respublika* (2006) and *Giperion* (2010) introduced a new concept of a bookstore combined with a club and/or a cafe where one could have a cup of coffee or lunch (*Bilingva* also had an alcoholic bar), linger over a book without having to buy it, and attend various cultural events—public talks, lectures, workshops, exhibitions, concerts. In Saint Petersburg, a bookstore/cafe/cultural centre called *Knigi i Kofe* ('Books and Coffee', 2008) was positioned as a quiet, non-alcoholic, non-smoking and laptop-friendly space, all of which was quite novel. Loud music was the problem of all public places in Russia in the 2000s, except for libraries and museums; alcohol consumption and smoking was an inherent attribute of most cafes, restaurants and clubs, especially the above-mentioned intelligentsia clubs; laptop squatters were not uncommon in chain coffeeshops but they had never been addressed as a target audience yet—the only exception was *Lebedev's Cafe* in Moscow (2008), opened by a designer and businessman Artemy Lebedev, also known as one of the most popular Russian bloggers (hence the digital culture bent). Overall, intellectual leisure, often referred to as 'edutainment',³⁶ became a new popular trend in Russian youth and young adult culture of the late 2010s, which offered a stark contrast to the 1990s and early 2000s, when 'nerds' were considered losers and one would hardly associate the word 'lecture' with entertainment and pleasure (Kuleva, 2011); this trend was largely influenced by the rise of bobo/hipster culture in the Global North (Brooks, 2000; Schiermer, 2013).

Yet another novelty of the late 2000s, also forming the hybrid trend in placemaking, was the emergence of creative clusters, growing on the ruins (both literally and figuratively) of the Soviet manufacturing industry and pre- and post-revolutionary housing in Moscow (*Artplay*, *Krasnyi Oktyabr*, *Khokhlovka*, etc.) and Saint Petersburg (*Taiga*, *Tkachi*, *RAF*, *Krasnyi Treugolnik*, etc.) and enclosing art and craft studios, IT startups, small shops, cafes, galleries, and, sometimes, co-housing units. Some of these clusters evolved as artistic lofts and then passed through the classic process of gentrification (Zukin, 1989), others, founded by commercial developers and corporate

³⁶ Contrastingly to its original meaning in English, in Russian the word 'edutainment', promoted since 2009 by a Moscow-based youth website called *Teorii i Praktiki* (see in more detail further in this section), was interpreted as a combination of education and entertainment in public events (public talks, lectures, workshops) rather than media content.

investors, skipped the DIY stage; both types were characterised by cultural elitism and cliquishness (Zhel'nina, 2012a; Pershina and Ivanov, 2016). Not only did clusters' residents consider the outsiders—working-class locals or non-creative urbanites in general—alien and ignorant, but they also perceived such clusters as independent microcosms (as Zhelnina shows in her study, even clusters located in the same district expressed little or no interest in each other's activity).

In contrast to the relatively variegated landscape of the social and cultural life in Moscow and Saint Petersburg, provincial cities offered very few options for the educated class. In the mid- and late 2000s, each Russian city with a population exceeding one million had at least one 'art cafe' (or 'jazz cafe', or 'art club')—a cafe or bar with live music, also serving as a small concert venue. Unlike Moscow's intelligentsia clubs, provincial art cafes were not used as a home from home, as they were intended for cultural consumption rather than culture-mediated social interaction (such orientation also made them less cliquey). Another phenomenon of the 2000s, the film club, was even more ubiquitous and, most importantly, more inclusive, as such clubs were typically organised by enthusiastic young people at the premises of some cultural or educational institution (museum, house/palace of culture, university) on a non-profit basis. For no or a very small fee (cheaper than a ticket to a multiplex cinema), charged to cover the venue rental costs³⁷ and/or snacks, literally anyone could visit a film screening, often followed by discussion. Film genres varied from international classic to non-mainstream and 'hidden gems', all of which was underrepresented in Russian multiplex theatres. Despite diverse demographics, brought together by such clubs (age range was especially remarkable), their social potential was limited by the fact that they were only temporary spaces, organised on a weekly or even monthly basis, and not all premises allowed for lingering after the screening; furthermore, due to the organisers' dependence on the will of their hosting institutions, many clubs were shut down or had to constantly change location.³⁸

One of such film clubs, Moscow's *Kinosreda*,³⁹ organised in 2009 by a young enthusiast Sasha Anevskiy, later was mentioned by Mitin as one of his key placemaking inspirations; moreover, in 2013 Anevskiy became the creative director of Ziferblat, so I will dwell on his project a bit longer. This space was in many regards

³⁷ Museums would typically charge organisers only a very small 'gratitude' fee; some palaces/houses of culture charged more as they perceived such clubs as an extra source of profit; universities did not charge anything.

³⁸ For instance, a film club, organised by my friends at one of Omsk's museums in 2010, was shut down because the administration reported *The Phantom of Liberty* by Luis Buñuel as 'pornography'.

³⁹ This is a word play of three Russian words, *kino* ('cinema') and *sreda* (which means both 'Wednesday' and 'milieu').

different from a typical Russian film club of the late 2000s: first, unlike most of them, centred around the organiser who had the privilege to choose films, Kinosreda was positioned as a club where anyone could show a film of their choice; it was emphasised that one does not have to be a sophisticated cinephile to join the club, but each presenter was expected to give a short talk, introducing the film and explaining why it was chosen. Second, socialising was no less (if not more) important than films themselves, as each screening was followed by a social with tea, wine and nibbles. Third, organisational costs were covered on a free donations basis. If Mitin was inspired by Kinosreda, Anevskiy's inspiration was *Weinerei*, a cooperative pay-what-you-want cafe/wine bar he once visited on a trip to Berlin; he was impressed with being treated 'not as a customer but as a friend, a participant, without whose support—as little as a few euros—this lovely, vibrant venue would simply cease to exist' (Anevsky, 2010). Initially located in Khokhlovka, in 2012–2014 Kinosreda had been changing venues; the club often met at Ziferblat's premises.

The fact that such a grassroots, non profit-driven and inclusive placemaking initiative as film clubs struggled to find its physical niche in the city illustrates the overall social and political situation of the late 2000s in Russia. The economic growth, bringing new social and cultural demands, was accompanied by a crackdown on rights and freedoms and shrinkage of the public sphere (Erpyleva, 2015)—or, rather, its migration into the digital space (Levinson, 2012). As forced collectivity of the Soviet era was replaced by social alienation and neoliberal urban politics, pushing individuals even deeper into private and parochial realms, for most Russians social media became the only space where they could expand their social circles and experience publicness, sharing interests and opinions and making new friends. In the mid-2000s, many online communities 'devirtualised'⁴⁰ through physical meetups; furthermore, some communities used social media as merely an instrument of communication and coordination, as their primary activity was located in urban public space (e.g., flash mobs, active urban games)⁴¹ or focused on face-to-face forms of the gift and sharing economy⁴² (Kviat, 2013).

Apart from sowing the seeds of trust and social cohesion, these forms of sociality paved the way for an entirely new phenomenon—civic activism. If the beginning of the

⁴⁰ Urban Dictionary defines the term 'devirtualisation', very popular in Russian social media in the mid- and late 2000s, as 'the act or process of meeting someone, with whom one has previously only had contact on the Internet, in real life for the first time'.

⁴¹ The game called Encounter and its numerous clones (e.g., Dozor, Skhvatka) are urban outdoor quests based on teamwork, collective problem-solving and orienteering.

⁴² E.g., *Daru Dar* ('A gift for a gift'), the largest Russian non-profit gift exchange movement aimed to 'create moments of trust, generosity and sincerity' (Daru Dar, 2008).

post-Soviet period was marked by mass rallies of thousands of people, by the mid-2000s Russian society was utterly depoliticised: political activism was stigmatised as 'useless' or 'freaky', and even the very word 'politics' was commonly interpreted as 'dirty tricks' (Erpyleva, op. cit.: 108). Remarkably, all protest movements of the mid- and late 2000s positioned themselves as civil rather than political: Arkhnadzor was protecting Moscow's historical buildings from illegal demolition; Strategiya-31 was asserting the right to peaceful assembly, guaranteed by Article 31 of the Russian Constitution and systematically violated by city authorities across Russia; Obshchestvo Sinikh Vederok (The Blue Bucket Society) fought against officials' misuse of blue emergency lights letting them avoid sitting in traffic jams; all three were coordinated and promoted through social media. Even though in 2006–2008 Apshu and Bilingva hosted a series of political debates moderated by a lawyer Alexei Navalny, this phenomenon remained rather parochial, whereas Navalny's anti-corruption cyberactivism in 2009–2010 brought him national and international prominence as 'Russia's Julian Assange' (Clover and Benton, 2011) and afterwards made him one of the most influential voices of the Russian opposition. Public outrage about corruption and state inefficiency escalated after the 2010 Russian wildfires, when a grassroots campaign organised in social media—an unprecedented effort of hundreds of people donating funds, exchanging information and coordinating physical work in affected regions—turned out to be more efficient than the official rescue operation (Antonova, 2010). A common sentiment of the end of 2010 was captured in an essay entitled 'Prozhivem bez gosudarstva' ('We don't need no government'), where a popular Russian journalist Andrei Loshak summarised recent cases of corruption and state violence, contrasting them to the rise of digital activism and volunteering in Russia and expressing optimism about this new culture of grassroots collaboration, based on DIY ethics and practices (Loshak, 2010).

3.2.3. 2011–2012: reclaiming the city?

It is no coincidence that the above-mentioned protest movements of the late 2000s focused on the issues of the citizens' right to the city, be it historical buildings, squares, or roads. The overall lack of civil rights and political participation was embodied in people's everyday experience of discomfort and disempowerment, making them feel like objects rather than subjects of urban politics (Levinson, 2012). When the September 2011 announcement of Putin's forthcoming return to the presidency (as if the result of the May 2012 presidential election had already been known), followed by over 1,600 reports of election irregularities and vote fraud in the December legislative election (all of which was documented and disseminated in social media by thousands of civilian electoral observers—another iteration of the fledgling volunteering movement

of the 2010s), triggered an unprecedented wave of street protests across the country in 2011–2012, the demand for an open, transparent and accountable government was to a large extent translated into the demand for a comfortable and friendly city where one could experience community and belonging (Levinson, *op. cit.*; Zhelnina, 2013). In Moscow, the headquarters of Russian federal authorities, one of the most popular protest slogans was ‘This city is ours’ (Arkhipova and Alekseevskiy, 2014). Furthermore, mass rallies were accompanied by such experimental forms of protest as The Big White Circle⁴³, Occupy Abai⁴⁴ and ‘citizens walks’,⁴⁵ altogether, it represented the battle of the ‘city of citizens’ against the ‘city of authorities’ (Kviat, 2012).

Demographically, the 2011–2012 protests were associated with the social group labelled as ‘middle class’, ‘creative class’, ‘educated class’, or ‘angry urbanites’—in many media and academic publications these concepts were used interchangeably (Gabrielian, 2013; Zhelnina, 2013; Arkhipova and Alekseevskiy, 2014; Walker, 2015). Although the ephemerality of the protest communities and the number of people involved did not allow for a thorough sociodemographic analysis, all reporters and researchers stressed the fact that a typical protester was an educated 25–40 year old urban professional with a secure job. Using the dichotomy suggested by the critical urban theorist Peter Marcuse (2009: 185), it can be said that it was the protest of ‘the discontented’ (with limiting their potentials for growth and creativity) rather than ‘the deprived’ (of basic material and existing legal rights)—this is how the 2011–2012 events in Russia differ from the otherwise similar (*i.e.*, drawing on social media technologies and using the right to the city rhetoric) urban protests that took place across the globe in the late 2000s—early 2010s (see, for example, Marom, 2013; Padawangi, 2013; Burgum, 2015; Vicino and Fahlberg, 2017). To quote Marcuse again, the agents and lackeys of power typically respond to actual and anticipated urban protests with efforts to channel or sublimate the discontent and deprivation (Marcuse, *op. cit.*: 191). In the Russian case, such channelling/sublimation involved, on the one hand, alienating the deprived (the working class, provincial urbanites, rural dwellers) against ‘rich and jaded Muscovites’,⁴⁶ ‘hipsters’ and ‘creacles’,⁴⁷ and, on the

⁴³ An over 15 km human chain along the Garden Ring—a circular road around Kremlin.

⁴⁴ A peaceful protest camp, set up on the next day after Putin’s inauguration in the middle of Chistoprudny Boulevard, a pedestrian street within three kilometres from Kremlin, near the monument of a Kazakh writer Abai Kunanbaev. It was shut down by the police in eight days.

⁴⁵ A series of mass peaceful walks organised after mass arrests at Bolotnaya rally (this protest, involving over 20,000 people, took place at Bolotnaya square on the 6 May 2012, the day before Putin’s inauguration) to check whether Muscovites can freely walk around the city centre without a special permission from the authorities. Apart from Moscow, citizens walks occurred in Saint Petersburg, Nizhny Novgorod, Stavropol and some other Russian cities.

⁴⁶ As it was mentioned before, in reality the 2011–2012 protests were not limited to Moscow.

⁴⁷ A derisive term invented and promoted by the Kremlin to stigmatise the creative class (again, often confused with the middle class, or the financially privileged, or the educated).

other hand, making the discontented believe that their social and cultural demands—narrowed down to the demand for a new urban aesthetic—are heard and acted on (Shchukin, 2014).

The first and most visible manifestation of this new cultural policy was the renovation of Gorky Park in 2011–2012. What used to be a mixture of ‘rusty rides’, ‘pot-holed roads’, ‘drunks and stray dogs’ and ‘piles of rubbish’, turned into ‘an urban paradise’ (Elder, 2012; Walker, 2015) with ping-pong tables, sport courts and cycle lanes, open-air cinema and library, neat lawns and clean decks with beanbags and lounge chairs, free wifi and charging points, a rich cultural programme and free classes for adults and children, CCTV, emergency phones and polite stewards wearing a ‘friendly’ beige uniform (Kuchuk, 2012). Just like the renovation of New York City’s parks in the 1980s, also known as ‘pacification by cappuccino’ (Zukin, 1995: 27–29), these changes aimed to make Gorky Park safe and aesthetically attractive to ‘normal users’—families, young professionals, the middle class—and keep the ‘undesirables’ out. At the same time, the new Gorky Park—rather unconsciously than otherwise—turned back to its Soviet roots as a display of the new cultural policy (now reflecting the ‘liveable city’, or ‘city for people’ ideology and promoting a new leisure culture, based on the principles of edutainment and healthy living)⁴⁸ and a social condenser (in this new iteration, the park’s visitors were supposed to practice trust and consideration and experience new forms of interaction with the space)⁴⁹. Following the success of this project, city authorities expanded the scope of renovation to dozens of other parks in Moscow; meanwhile, the director of Gorky Park, Sergei Kapkov, was appointed as the head of the Moscow Department of Culture. Another large-scale placemaking project of the 2011–2012 was the revitalisation of Moscow’s libraries, inspired by the example of the Netherlands where public libraries were reinvented as third places (Grozniy, 2012).

The concept of third place first appeared in Russian public discourse in the end of August 2011, when a youth website called *Teorii i Praktiki* (‘Theories and Practices’), promoting the ideas of edutainment and lifelong learning, organised a roundtable on third places. For some reason the T&P team reframed Oldenburg’s concept as a ‘neither-office-nor-home space for remote work and study’ and justified the need for

⁴⁸ Upon a closer look, one might question the newness of this culture. Although the above-mentioned trends were very different from the post-Soviet period (where education was largely devaluated and the idea of healthy living was absent from the public discourse), there is an interesting parallel between the ideas and practices of leisure promoted by Gorky Park in the early 2010s and in the Stalinist era.

⁴⁹ Thus, visitors were allowed to walk on lawns, which had always been prohibited in Russian parks since Soviet times (see, for example, Zhelnina, 2012b), and offered free skates and parasols for rent. Communication patterns used in the Gorky Park’s signs (e.g., ‘Thank you for not smoking here’, ‘Thank you for treating our furniture like your own’) were strikingly different from the language of prohibitions and threats traditionally used in Russian public places (again, another heritage of Soviet times).

such spaces with the following argument: 'The development of ICT and the rise of the creative class has changed the people's demand—now everything one needs for work is a computer, wifi, and a local community' (Teorii i Praktiki, 2011). Kapkov, invited to this event as one of the key speakers, went even further and limited the definition of third place to 'a space for creative professionals and the creative class'. Drawing on the example of Gorky Park, he emphasised that the new generation of public places should be designed not only for leisure but also for remote work (Ibid). Not only was this interpretation of the theory of third place—presumably, inspired by the ideas of Florida (2005) and Landry (1995)⁵⁰—extremely exclusive in terms of class and occupation, but it also conveniently enclosed the neoliberal work ethos within the glittering rhetoric of digital nomadism and creativity. On the 21 September 2011 (one week before Ziferblat's opening), the T&P team launched a separate website called *Tretie Mesto* ('Third Place')—a catalogue of Moscow's and Saint Petersburg's third places, i.e. 'cafes, libraries, parks, and other spaces where a creative professional can comfortably work' (Tretie Mesto, 2011). The initial list included only 25 places: sixteen libraries, six cafes, two creative clusters, and Gorky Park. The further development of this catalogue illustrates the rate of market growth (109 places in Moscow and 20 more in Saint Petersburg by October 2012), the appearance of new spatial forms (coworking spaces since 2011⁵¹, anti-cafes since 2012) and the difficulties of categorisation (e.g., Ziferblat and other anti-cafes were classified as 'lofts' up until the closure of this website in 2013).

A wider analysis of Russian media in 2012–2013 demonstrates the phenomenon that can be best described as the 'urbanism boom': the words 'public place', 'third place', 'placemaking', 'city', 'urban environment', or just 'urban' become the most popular buzzwords; new spots and experimental spatial forms—hybrid spaces positioning themselves as 'a hostel/coworking', 'an anti-cafe/waffle bar', 'a barbershop/cafe', or just 'a space'—appear every month, if not week; Moscow Urban Forum, held by the city's authorities annually since 2012, turns into a key policy event, bringing together urban planners from all over the world; overall, the urban agenda is discussed in all possible forms and contexts. 2013 was the year of Moscow's coffee and foodie revolution, often compared to the gastronomic boom in the 1990s London (Walker, 2015), and yet another renovation, this time affecting Moscow's streets and curated by the Danish

⁵⁰ Unlike Oldenburg, both theorists were known in Russia well before 2011. 'The Rise of the Creative Class' by Florida and 'The Creative City' by Landry were published in Russian in 2005 and actively discussed in academic and public discourse in 2005–2008; Landry gave a public talk in Moscow in 2005, Florida was interviewed by *Kommersant*, one of the most influential Russian newspapers in 2008.

⁵¹ Since 2013, Moscow city authorities have opened six public coworking spaces with fee-free access.

architect and urban theorist Jan Gehl, the author of the 'city for people' concept, used as a catch-phrase by Moscow city authorities since 2011.

However, behind this impressive façade one could find the same old problem of Russian placemaking—a top-down approach where the city 'offers gifts' to its residents instead of engaging them in the decision-making process,⁵² whereas grassroots and DIY projects, mainly promoted by two non-profit platforms, Partizaning and Delai Sammit,⁵³ were very scarce and offered only local and temporary solutions, mostly on a neighbourhood level. Not only was this top-down urbanism imposing innovations, but it also limited them to Moscow and just a few other Russian cities, receiving more federal funding than the others—Saint Petersburg, Kazan, Vladivostok, and the Olympic Sochi (Shchukin, 2014), albeit even Saint Petersburg's local 'Gorky Park', New Holland Island, could not afford a fee-free entrance system (Zheltnina, 2012a). Another critical argument was suggested by a sociologist Viktor Vakhshstein (cited in: Soshnikov, 2012), who described the above-mentioned changes as 'hipster urbanism' and 'cargo cult', where Gehl's principles—applicable to Copenhagen but not to Moscow—were blindly co-opted whilst ignoring the real problems of Russia's capital (corruption, neoliberal urban politics, migration issues, housing crisis) and excluding non-middle-class groups from the new urban agenda. That said, this elitist approach, however blatant it was, resulted from an attempt of the middle/educated class to assert their right to the city—unlike the case with the New York City renovation discussed in Zukin's book, this social group had never been culturally dominant in Soviet and post-Soviet urban politics. Furthermore, the extent and means of this exclusion varied from case to case. For instance, Gorky Park, despite replacing low-profile fast-food stalls with pricey cafes, offered free drinking fountains (Kuchuk, 2012), whereas New Holland Island, apart from introducing an entrance fee, prohibited its visitors from bringing their own food and drinks, which was celebrated by those considering themselves cultured and educated as a measure protecting them from the 'bydlo',⁵⁴ who would 'immediately contaminate the space with alcohol, grilled chicken and boiled eggs'⁵⁵ (Zheltnina, 2012a: 54–55). Moscow's renovated libraries turned out to be the most inclusive public place, available to literally anyone, including homeless people, often using them as a

⁵² See the comment of an architect Evgeny Asse in: Walker, op. cit.

⁵³ A wordplay of the expression *delai sam* (Russian for 'do it yourself') and the word 'summit'.

⁵⁴ A Russian derogatory term (literally 'cattle'), the closest British and American analogues of which are 'chavs', 'white trash' or 'rednecks'.

⁵⁵ Grilled chicken was a typical Russian fast-food option of the 2000s; boiled eggs were a popular road and picnic snack in Soviet times. This intolerance to the attributes of low-profile leisure was typical even for such grassroots projects as, for example, Omsk City Picnic—a self-organised crowdfunded urban festival (2012–2014), the visitors of which expressed a very similar attitude to the alcohol ban on the festival's site (Kviat, 2014b).

daytime shelter (Artiushina et al., 2018), but, again, that was a Moscow rather than nationwide phenomenon.

After the crackdown on the 2011–2012 protests, the discontented became disenchanted; many of them channelled their energy into what the pre-revolutionary intelligentsia called ‘the politics of small-scale changes’,⁵⁶ this time reinterpreted as starting a small socially responsible business (e.g., quality coffeeshops, non-mainstream bookstores) or engaging in volunteering; others found solace in the private domain (Saprykin and Trabun, 2014). However, the unresolved issues of corruption and inequality and further worsening of the political and economic climate challenged this strategy. For instance, according to Mitin and many other anti-cafe owners (Cherkudinova, 2012; Berezhnov, 2013), one of the key drivers of the anti-cafe boom in Russia was the fact that this form of business was a blind spot for corrupted inspection bodies—as Mitin once explained, *‘If Ziferblat was a grocery shop or a cafe, they would go taxman on us in half an hour’* (interview in: Gurova, 2012). Meanwhile, the top-down renovation of Moscow continued on an even larger scale, leaving less and less room for citizen participation and explicitly advocating for neoliberal values.⁵⁷ By 2015, most experts agreed that the ‘Moscow experiment’ had come to an end (Walker, op. cit.).

3.3. The placemaker: Ziferblat’s history through a biographical lens

3.3.1. Growing up in the Third Space

Born in Moscow in 1984, Mitin was 26 when he opened Treehouse; by the time he turned 30, Ziferblat had already become an international chain. From what is known about his family, it can be concluded that he comes from a relatively privileged background, though these privileges were mostly cultural rather than financial, as is typically the case with the vast majority of the Soviet and post-Soviet intelligentsia (Volkov, 1999; Shevchenko, 2009: 25–29; Filtzer, 2014; Gamsa, 2014). As he says in one of his media interviews, *‘I was lucky to be born in a family surrounded by books’* (Fahrutdinov, 2015). Although his grandparents on both sides belonged to the Soviet academic elite, both Mitin’s parents represent a much more precarious layer, or, as Filtzer (op. cit.: 625) put it, ‘the very lowest rungs of the intelligentsia’. His mother, also born in Moscow, studied geology and literature in the 1980s, freelanced as a journalist and wrote novels in the 1990s, volunteered in various charity funds and managed

⁵⁶ People’s houses, mentioned in section 3.1, were a part of this ideology.

⁵⁷ At the 2014 Moscow Urban Forum, Kapkov, nicknamed ‘Cupcake’ and ‘the minister of hipsters’ and overall considered ‘the only humane figure in Putin’s government’, suddenly attacked the audience with the following tirade: *‘It’s not a welfare city! You want more pedestrian zones, more free cinemas for people? Why free? Get off your asses and go work, go make money. Did you see the dollar’s rate [after the post-Crimea sanctions]? Nothing’s gonna be free anymore!’* (NTV, 2014).

press relations for one of them in the 2000s, then became a craft artist and moved to a small Crimean village. Mitin's father, a self-taught painter from Leningrad, started off as a book restorer, then joined the community of artists selling their paintings on Arbat; in the 1990s-2000s, he moved to Pushchino, a small town near Moscow, where he continued as a graphic artist and painter and turned to creative writing.

Such career trajectories are quite typical for those whom the cultural anthropologist Alexei Yurchak called 'the last Soviet generation', i.e. people who came of age during late socialism (Yurchak, 2005). Many of them, especially those coming from intelligentsia families, would avoid more lucrative and prestigious occupations and go for low-wage or part-time jobs, putting them at the margins of the Soviet system but at the same time giving them more independence and freedom to pursue their creative passions, being practically invisible to the state (e.g., work in art restoration was a standard career choice for underground artists). It is remarkable how in the following quote Mitin's father uses a heterotopic rhetoric of escape from the system into its 'holes and chasms' (Lefebvre, [1968] 1996: 156) leading to the 'spaces of hope' (Harvey, 2000), whereby Ziferblat is perceived as a space akin to the spirit of perestroika but at the same time representing 'post-Soviet nostalgia (...) for the very real humane values, ethics, friendships, and creative possibilities that the reality of socialism afforded' (Yurchak, op. cit.: 8), as opposed to the 1990s-2000s neoliberalism:

Arbat was an entire microcosm. In 1986-1987, everyone was so excited, there was something in the air, just like here in Ziferblat, a hope for the better world. (...) I've been to the renovated Gorky Park recently, I kind of liked it, but it felt so unfamiliar and alien, as if it was somewhere in the Baltics. This is not the Moscow I used to love, even though it was rougher than now. What was really good about that time, was that plenty of niches and holes where you would hide from the Soviet state and its march to progress. A sort of wu wei⁵⁸. I am from 'the generation of street sweepers and night watchers'⁵⁹, you know. Ziferblat is just one locale now, but back at that time, it was everywhere, in every housing committee club; wherever you went, you would always find someone to bond with. (Ziferblat's interview with Pavel Mitin, see in: Ziferblat, 2015a)

The key values of the generation of Mitin's parents were community (or, rather, small communities) and friendship, whereas monetary concerns were considered vile and shameful (Yurchak, op. cit.: 138), which roots back to the mindset of Russian pre-revolutionary intelligentsia and, overall, Russian Orthodox culture, as opposed to Protestantism. Political issues were neglected as dull and irrelevant; according to Yurchak (Ibid.: 130), most young people of late socialism, despite engaging in all necessary rituals and discursive practices, did not take the official propaganda

⁵⁸ A Taoist concept of 'non-doing', very popular among the late socialist creative youth.

⁵⁹ *The Generation of Street Sweepers and Night Watchmen* is a 1987 rock anthem by Aquarium, one of the most popular Russian rock bands, also cited in Yurchak's book.

seriously, but, nevertheless, preferred to stay beyond the 'Soviet state vs. dissidents' dichotomy. Their interests and hobbies were dominated by the 'elsewhere' sentiment, which resulted in the production of the alternative, often imaginary spaces that were spatially, temporarily, thematically and meaningfully distant from Soviet authoritative discourse.⁶⁰ An important part of this sentiment was the cultural construct that Yurchak calls the 'Imaginary West', i.e. a 'diverse array of discourses, statements, products, objects, visual images, musical expressions, and linguistic constructions' (Ibid.: 161) associated with the Western countries, as the vast majority of Soviet citizens could not visit them up until 1991. The closest real emplacement of this construct was the western frontier of the USSR—Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, perceived as the most 'foreign' destination within domestic tourism (hence Pavel Mitin's reference to 'the Baltics').

Unlike his parents, Mitin had access to the real West from his early childhood—his maternal grandparents, Soviet Jews, expatriated to Germany in 1992, so he would visit them almost every summer since he was eight. In his media interviews, he mentions these trips among a few biographical factors that had the greatest impact on Ziferblat (Gurova, 2014; Fahrutdinov, 2015). For instance, after stating that Russian cities lack free-access third places, he points to community spaces in German apartment blocks as a positive example (Mitin, 2012c). However, given how little room the new Russian capitalism had for intelligentsia families like his (Shevchenko, 2009: 25–29), Mitin's opportunity to travel abroad as a child and teenager was still relatively limited. Although he always emphasises that he was 'raised on English culture' (interview in: Nikitina, 2013) and his favourite writers were Lewis Carroll, A.A. Milne, Conan Doyle, and C.S. Lewis (interview: Skibiuk, 2014), his first encounter with real England in 2013 was rather shocking as he was expecting to see gentlemen wearing top hats and walking with canes around London (Nikitina, op. cit.), which strikingly resembles how Soviet people of his parents' generation were stunned by their first trips to Western countries in the early 1990s—not because of culture shock but because of 'a sudden realisation that the real West was somehow "ordinary"' (Yurchak, op. cit.: 205), as opposed to an idealised (or demonised) space constructed in their imagination. This example illustrates how, like many other people belonging to the post-Soviet generation of Russian youth (Pilkington et al., 2002), Mitin came of age in the Third Space (Bhabha, 1994) between socialism and capitalism, granted with the new opportunities that his parents did not have, but still to a large extent shaped by Soviet culture.

⁶⁰ E.g., ancient history and religion; foreign and pre-revolutionary Russian art, literature and music; archaeological and geological expeditions, hiking and mountaineering (Yurchak, op. cit.: 150–160).

However, along with these new privileges brought by Russia's transition to capitalism, Mitin and his generation faced the new challenges. With the collapse of Soviet social relations and institutions, the Russian youth of the 1990s was left to their own devices, having to deal with the explosion of social inequality, the redistribution of wealth through organised crime and an unprecedented growth of street violence, including youth crime (Omelchenko, 2013; Omel'chenko, 2015; Stephenson, 2015). Despite often using the word 'sovok'⁶¹ in his media interviews, Mitin claims that he feels nostalgic about the Soviet past—or, more precisely, about those aspects of Sovietness 'that were lost in the years of savage capitalism' (interview in: Fahrutdinov, 2015)—just like his father in his above-cited memories. At the same time, he admits that 'the wild 1990s'⁶² had a great impact on his mindset, which he nevertheless would prefer to erase:

I hardly managed to get rid of this 1990s mentality. When I was a kid, hanging out on the streets, my friends and I were constantly being brainwashed by gang lads, imposing their norms and rules on us. Unfortunately, these ideas sank in. (...) I realised that I have to wash it out of my system when I noticed recently that I started treating Ziferblat as a business. Craving for fame and money, I engaged in business—this attitude comes from the 1990s. Obsessed with the desire to make as much money as possible and turn Ziferblat into a global chain, like Starbucks, I started to forget why I created it in the first place. It occurred to me that such an approach makes Ziferblat nothing more than a cafe with a quirky financial model. And I decided to change the course. I am going to avoid the business approach as long as possible. I am ready to be left with nothing, but I want to try a new, revolutionary model of relationship between people that is not based on monetary exchange. (Mitin's interview in: Vylegzhanin, 2012)

This quote shows how the traditionally disparaging attitude towards money among Russian intelligentsia, inherited by Mitin from his family background, has been intensified by his personal experience of Russian 'savage capitalism' in the 1990s, when business and mafia were intertwined to the extent of inseparability (Stephenson, 2015). Such an extreme attitude, condemning engagement in business as a morally wrong life choice, is by no means characteristic of all post-Soviet youth—as mentioned above, it seems to stem from Mitin's class rather than generational belonging. However, Russian millennials, just like their Western contemporaries, in general value meaningful and self-fulfilling jobs more than financial success at any cost (RuGenerations, 2011; Warnell, 2012; Shamis, 2017). As Indira Alymkulova (whose class background is different from that of Mitin, as will be discussed further in this chapter) put it in her radio interview about Ziferblat, '*Our generation engages in*

⁶¹ Russian derogatory slang term for the Soviet Union and its social and cultural aftermath; in some contexts may also mean a 'typical' Soviet person.

⁶² A retroactive label introduced by Putin's propagandists in the 2000s to highlight his role as a national leader who 'brought stability'.

business not just for money' (Troyanskaya, 2017). Furthermore, this fragment sheds light on the challenges of adolescent socialisation in Russian cities in the post-Soviet period, as nonstreet teenagers were often bullied, physically attacked or robbed by lads, whose culture became dominant in the street social order (Stephenson, op. cit.: 194).

The latter explains why, according to his interviews, Mitin spent most of his childhood and early adolescent years in virtual spaces, gaming and surfing at home or at game clubs. Not only does he frame it as the only alternative to gang-dominated streets in the 1990s (interview in: Vylegzhanin, 2012), but he also considers his digital literacy an important part of his cultural capital, proudly stating that he got his first personal computer—and what is more, access to internet—in 1994, '*right after its appearance*'⁶³ (interview in: Vazari, 2012), '*when none of the teachers had a clue about it*'⁶⁴ (Mitin, 2015a). This idea of escape from dangerous streets to a safer virtual milieu closely echoes the 1990s – early 2000s debates in urban ICT studies discussed in chapter 1, which is another example of how the local and the global are interwoven in Mitin's biography and, consequently, Ziferblat's history. Quite contrary to how Russian sociologist Elena Omelchenko (2015: 250-251) contrasts the traumatic experience of the post-Soviet youth with that of their more privileged Western contemporaries, urban ICT studies perspective suggests that both Russian and Western children of Mitin's age felt more at home in the 'city of bits' (Mitchell, 1995) than they did in real urban spaces. Just like Western millennials (Warnell, 2012), Mitin identifies himself as a 'digital native' (Prensky, 2001), perceiving this as a shared rather than individual identity, as he emphasises that the core audience of Ziferblat '*have grown up with computers and internet*' (interview in: Gurova, 2012). This corresponds with the findings of the RuGenerations research project—as they suggest, even though the post-Soviet reality had a great impact on Russian millennials, their values were to a much larger extent shaped by globalisation and the development of ICT (Sokolova, 2010).

In all other respects, Mitin seems to negotiate the local and the global like a typical representative of the post-Soviet youth—the generation that grew up 'looking West' (Pilkington et al., 2002). Like many of them, he often invokes the narrative of 'catching

⁶³ The official 'birth date' of the Russian segment of the internet, also known as Runet, is 7 April 1994.

⁶⁴ Such an early entry into digital culture was indeed a rare privilege. According to the first national survey measuring internet use in Russia, in 2000 only 3,6% of Russian urban dwellers were using internet on a regular basis, and only 28% of them had internet access on their home PCs (Osion, 2001). However, these numbers had been growing rapidly; thus, in 2011, when the first Ziferblat was opened, internet penetration rate in Russia topped 50%, and more than one third of Russian households were connected to broadband internet (Chistov and Kazarian, 2011).

up with the West' (Pilkington and Omel'chenko, 2002: 203), framing the latter as 'an example of modernity to which to aspire' (Ibid.: 203), as opposed to 'sovok' and the 1990s that should be left behind as the traumatic past:

Journalist: What kind of people go to Ziferblat?

Mitin: Very different, but mostly youth—school kids, students. I've been thinking, whether it's good or bad. After all, I decided that it's good. Young people are clay in our hands. My generation and the older one lived through some crazy times—first sovok, then the 1990s. Today's youth, born in the early 1990s, grew up in a more or less normal time when we have become a bit more like Europe. Whatever you show them now will determine their future life choices. I suppose, when they listen to jazz in Ziferblat instead of Diskoteka Avariya,⁶⁵ it's already a good influence.

(Mitin's interview in: Vylegzhanin, 2012)

The following extract from another interview gives a more detailed perspective of Mitin's idea of the West and the impact of this normative concept on his placemaking projects:

I was lucky to have a chance to study in the Moscow International Film School.⁶⁶ In 1999, when crimson jackets, devyatki and shootouts⁶⁷ just had come to an end, there certainly were no Ziferblats, no refined cafes, and, overall, aesthetically speaking, Russian public places were a pitiful sight, whereas the film school had a completely different atmosphere, akin to what we saw in those TV series about American schools⁶⁸—we would sit on the floor, place our desks however we wanted, there was also a cool cafeteria where you could watch movies. It was this environment that appealed to me, not even the perspective of film making as such. I got a lot of valuable experience out of it—a model of relationship between people that was new for me, a more open aesthetic. To a certain extent, this experience was incorporated in Ziferblat afterwards. (Mitin's interview in: Fahrutdinov, 2015)

This memory provides a snapshot into the life of a Russian teenager at the turn of the 2000s: the attributes of the 'savage capitalism' of the 1990s are gone, but new ethical and aesthetic standards for public places are yet to come; at the same time, the new culture starts penetrating Russian cities, creating heterotopic enclaves like that film school where the 'Imaginary West' was embodied in the freedom of bodily movement and interaction with the space and a less hierarchic relationship between students and teachers.

⁶⁵ Russian Eurodance/pop rap band. It is remarkable how Mitin contrasts this style with jazz, representing the 'Europeanness'.

⁶⁶ This institution, founded in 1991, provides free extracurricular training in film production and photography for middle and high school students between 12 and 17 years old.

⁶⁷ Crimson jackets (an outfit that was popular among Russian mafia members), *devyatki* ('nineies', a slang term for VAZ 2109, a Russian car model), and the shootouts happening in public spaces and places are the attributes typically associated with the criminal era of the 1990s.

⁶⁸ For instance, *Beverly Hills 90210*, which was extremely popular among Russian teenagers in the 1990s.

Fast-forwarding to the time when Ziferblat has already opened, even in 2014, after the ‘urbanism boom’, Mitin considered Russia (or at least placemaking in Russia) to be lagging behind the West, both ethically and aesthetically. In the following quote, he uses the word ‘sovok’ anachronistically, as an umbrella concept for the lack of personal initiative as the aftermath of the Soviet past and the greed for gain as a part of the 1990s business culture:

Aesthetically, public places in Moscow—bookstores, shops, restaurants, hostels, parks—are lame. A very few interesting places emerged recently. Ziferblat’s ex-manager opened his own bookstore, someone else opened their little coffeeshops. Something good is happening in Gorky Park. I think, entrepreneurs in Russia lack having a personal approach to business and setting high goals other than profit. Everything is still imbued with sovok. (Mitin’s interview in: Skibiuk, 2014)

Paradoxically, but still characteristically for his generation (Pilkington et al., 2002), despite regarding Russia as backward, Mitin sees himself, his contemporaries and those younger than them as global citizens and thinks of Ziferblat as a global project (noteworthy, the quote below belongs to 2012, when Ziferblat had yet to expand beyond Moscow):

You see, our generation and those younger... yes, Russian mentality, blah-blah-blah, but we have the same interests and aspirations as America does. We watch the same films, listen to the same music, it’s not two different countries that have never met each other. Russian youth—well, the progressive youth, those who go to Ziferblat—they are very similar to the American youth. They travel around. So, I wouldn’t say that Ziferblat is a purely Russian project, suitable only for the Russians. (Mitin’s public talk in Moscow, see in: Mitin, 2012d)

After the opening in London, when Ziferblat hit the headlines across the world, Mitin asserted his own and Ziferblat’s global identity, repeatedly rejecting the labels ‘Soviet’ and ‘Russian’⁶⁹ and insisting that Ziferblat appeals to such universal values as community, interaction and sense of belonging:

While some might say the idea of an anti-cafe might fit in with collectivist ideas in Russian society, Mitin disagrees. In an email to Business Insider, he explained that he thought the idea was quite universal. ‘We touch upon archetypal things that are common between anyone on Earth—it doesn’t matter if you are Russian, African, European, North Korean, or whatever,’ Mitin writes. ‘It is a desire to be yourself and be loved unconditionally.’ (Taylor, 2014)

I really don’t think kommunalka⁷⁰ has anything to do with it. Or Russia. The desire to unite is the first thing we feel. It’s characteristic of primates. It has been present in all nations and sparked up here and there. It’s just that Russia has the most recent historical instance of this happening and

⁶⁹ To put this into perspective, one may find the same leitmotif in English media interviews of another Russian involved in the global cultural industry—Gosha Rubchinskiy, an internationally recognised fashion designer, also born in 1984 in Moscow.

⁷⁰ Soviet communal apartments.

because of human foolishness it was turned into the squalor called 'USSR'.
(Mitin's direct speech in: Galperina, 2014)

3.3.2. Looking for a niche

Summing up the above, the analysis of Mitin's biography demonstrates how his childhood and teenage years, spent in the Third Space between socialism and capitalism, predetermined some key dichotomies of Ziferblat, such as the imaginary vs. the real, the social vs. the commercial, the physical vs. the digital, the global vs. the local. As he was growing older, entering the job market as a young adult, his occupation and class identity became another important factor. In his media interviews (Vylegzhanin, 2012; Nikitina, 2014; Skibiuk, 2014), Mitin tells how he quit the above-mentioned film school, graduated from high school, spent two years in a theatre college, quit again, and never came back to education. Like his parents, he tried his hand at different arts (started a band, quit, wrote a novel, applied for a literary award for young writers, failed), worked in non-profit organisations and freelanced in media, volunteered in charity funds, then became a blogger. By 2010, his blog on LiveJournal, where he wrote on cultural and social issues, had over 1,000 followers, most of which joined after he posted his reports on Arkhnadzor and Strategia-31 protest actions. All this time he lived on a very tight budget, often choosing a pricey cup of coffee over buying groceries (interview in: Sanduliak, 2013), as he was pursuing his imaginary self—*'a French writer, sketching his novel on a napkin in a cafe'* (interview in: VKurse, 2012). In this desperate search for a niche where he would *'rise to such a level as that of Chekhov in literature, no matter in which area'*, he was longing for a space where he would feel welcome, understood and accepted (interview in: Politcom, 2014). As follows from his retrospective reflections, it was this precarious life at the fringes of the creative class in a neoliberal city that made him want to create his own, affordable and friendly venue.

Another reason was his growing interest in social activism and community building. In 2009, he came up with an initiative called Pocket Poetry and invited his followers to join him in making small laminated cards with classic poetry and spreading them in public spaces around the city. Mitin's goal was *'enlightening people, reintroducing them to the classics and making them focus on cultural rather than material values'* (interview in: Arsentieva, 2009). Pocket Poetry quickly became popular in Moscow, where Mitin and his friends would meet every other week, crafting cards and sharing the costs of printing, and in other Russian cities, where local enthusiasts followed their example. A 2010 television report on Pocket Poetry (Silaeva, 2010) gives a snapshot of the social and cultural context of the 2000s: while Mitin does not mince his words, describing the faces of people who read *'trashy novels and magazines in the subway'* as *'not*

overburdened with intelligence', the passers-by interviewed by the reporter on Moscow's streets approve this initiative as morally right and timely, implicitly referring to the public discourse on the cultural and educational collapse that happened after 1991 (Lovell, 2000).

3.3.3. Becoming a placemaker

According to Mitin, it was the Pocket Poetry experience that helped him to realise that his true calling was *'uniting people and creating a cosy, open, friendly atmosphere for them'* (Politcom, op. cit.). Not only did this project give him the first taste of bringing strangers together and engaging them in social and cultural participation and, to a certain extent, the sharing economy, but it also made him face the limitations of functionalist urban planning. The Pocket Poetry community had no other place to meet but cafes, where they would typically order nothing but a few hot drinks to be allowed to use the space for card making and chatting, so in most cases staff would try to make them leave, either implicitly (checking on them every few minutes, cleaning up their table, bringing them the bill) or explicitly. The same problem arose when Mitin, inspired by Kinosreda, decided to organise his own film club, which required hiring a venue. Meanwhile, he came across his ex-classmate who happened to have some savings from his *'well-paid but boring job'* and the desire to invest them in something more fulfilling (Ibid.); together, they decided to open a club, which was announced on Mitin's blog on 19 October 2010. Along with four more friends of Mitin's, they gathered 200,000 rubles⁷¹ and rented a small commercial property in an attic of a residential building. In about a month, this place, not having a name yet and referred to as *'dom na dereve'* ('a treehouse') or just *'dom'* ('a home')⁷², welcomed its first guests. The whole process of opening was discussed in much detail in Mitin's blog, where he tested his immediate ideas and gathered feedback from his followers.

The analysis of these discussions demonstrates how the idea of Treehouse, co-constructed by Mitin and his followers as some kind of Foucauldian heterotopia of compensation (*'it will be the most comfortable place in Moscow'*), not only represented their wants and needs but also incorporated many placemaking trends of the late 2000s. Initially, Mitin wanted to open *'a club where one would feel like home, relax, have a cup of tea and biscuits, read a book, watch a film (...), a place affordable for any cultured person, regardless of their financial situation (...); there will be books, some of them will be sold for a very reasonable price'*; it was also anticipated that this

⁷¹ About £4,170, as of October 2010. This amount of money was intended for covering a few months of rent and housekeeping costs.

⁷² There is only one word for both 'house' and 'home' in Russian language—*dom*.

club would serve food and there would be a bar counter (Mitin, 2010a). Altogether, this initial plan looks like a combination of the intelligentsia clubs⁷³ (but smaller and less cliquey), hybrid bookstores of the late 2000s, and home. The followers—with a remarkable unanimity in their comments—described the club of their dreams as a space with a lot of books, cosy armchairs, rugs, cushions and throws, quiet music (jazz and retro) or no music at all (by contrast with other public places), vintage furniture, wood, paintings and photographs on the walls, a public piano, board games and chess, wifi, art supplies, a good selection of tea⁷⁴, public talks by writers, poets and artists, and no smoking.⁷⁵ Not only were these suggestions realised in Treehouse, but they also predetermined Ziferblat's design—even in 2018 one would find all the above-mentioned in any Ziferblat across the world.

Shortly before Treehouse was opened, Mitin and his partners realised that they were not ready to deal with licensing and business issues, so the venue was reframed into *'neither a cafe nor a club but a home'*, operating on pay-what-you-want donations. In response to the sceptical comments from some of his followers, Mitin referred to Kinosreda as a positive example and said, *'I don't care about profit, I'm even ready to operate at a loss. I want a place where I would be around nice people, with whom I could do something together'* (Mitin, 2010c). This seemingly vague vision nevertheless demonstrates that Treehouse (as well as Mitin's first project, Pocket Poetry) was to a large extent fuelled by an impulsive desire for community and collective action, very typical for the late 2000s, and followed a typical trajectory of that time—from an online community to a physical 'space of appearance' (Arendt, 1958). Another addition to Treehouse's concept was an alcohol ban. Taking after its predecessors—the above-mentioned intelligentsia clubs and Kinosreda—Treehouse was never intended to be a dry venue, but this policy was introduced in just a few weeks of the opening in response to the neighbour's complaints about noise nuisance; soon after, it was reconsidered as a security measure protecting the venue from potentially abusive and violent visitors, and eventually turned into a sociocultural filter, later inherited by Ziferblat (see Mitin's interview in: Varlamov, 2011). Remarkably, this decision did not raise any objections from Treehouse's guests, which illustrates the paradigm shift in Russian, especially youth, leisure culture, reoriented towards healthy living (Omelchenko and Sabirova, 2011; cf. Pilkington, 2006).

⁷³ In one of his comments in that discussion, Mitin said that he was one of the people who had a key to Apshu; as I know from the interviews with Ziferblat Pokrovka staff, he was also a patron of Masterskaia.

⁷⁴ Moscow's coffee revolution was yet to happen in about three-five years.

⁷⁵ Although this point caused some debate, it was agreed that there is too much smoking in all other public places in Russia (which was banned only in 2014).

3.3.4. Speaking up: Ziferblat, protests and placemaking

As the opening of Ziferblat coincided with the beginning of the 2011–2012 protests and the subsequent ‘urbanism boom’, Mitin became a spokesperson for both. In December 2011, at the height of the protests, one of the Russian national television channels interviewed him among the representatives of those social groups that were not considered politically active until 2011 but joined the rallies. Mitin was labelled as a hipster (as the reporter summarised, ‘*long bangs, tight pants*’⁷⁶) and a digital native (‘*they followed the news on Facebook and filmed the rallies on their iPads*’), while Ziferblat was framed as a project ‘*inspired by the same demand for democracy that spurred the protests*’—as Mitin explained, ‘*I want to be on equal footing with my guests... they rent a space here and they treat it as their own, nobody serves them*’ (NTV, 2011)⁷⁷. In summer 2012, after the crackdown on the protests, he was interviewed by another popular media as a representative of ‘*the new Russian intelligentsia*’; this interview demonstrates his disenchantment with the protest movement and, speaking more widely, illustrates the reasons for its fall (class alienation, lack of a clear agenda) and a typical strategy of channelling/sublimation, embraced by the ‘angry urbanites’ (note how Ziferblat is discussed within the framework of ‘the politics of small-scale changes’):

Journalist: Occupy Abai was in just a five minute walking distance from Ziferblat—have you been there?

Mitin: I went there almost every day. We brought there some food from Ziferblat, invited some to warm up and sleep over. At the beginning, there was a lot of those you call ‘the new intelligentsia’, but they failed to self-organise. At some point, they were replaced by some hobos, nationalists, and other freaks. I quit when I saw some people boozing up and singing cheesy pop songs—this was definitely not the new intelligentsia.

Journalist: Why do you think did protests fail?

Mitin: Seems like we aren’t ready yet. And the leaders... I approached some of them, ‘Let’s do something, let’s repaint that ugly playground...’—‘Sure, sounds good...’, and then nothing.

Journalist: Do you think that protests are useless?

Mitin: I think it’s not Putin that’s the problem, it’s the nation. Every nation has the government it deserves, which is why I want to change the nation to make it deserve another government. If Navalny takes the power, it will end up the same—people haven’t changed.

⁷⁶ In a similar way, all English publications on Ziferblat’s opening in London commented on Mitin’s look (in 2014, he wore a moustache) as evidence of Ziferblat’s ‘hipster’ orientation.

⁷⁷ According to another media publication, this TV report caught the interest of Vladimir Kulchitskiy (b. 1950), the top manager of a Russian company providing consulting services in the aerospace industry. After a quick visit to Ziferblat, touched by the scene he saw there (‘*decent young people were talking about poetry like professional critics*’), he decided to invest in this business (interview with Alymkulova, see in: Zhanalinova, 2014). I am not aware of whether he still has a share in Ziferblat.

Journalist: And how to change them? Are you going to use Ziferblat for that?

Mitin: Ziferblat is already changing the world. It's a place that is free from simulacra, false values, toxic relationships, hypocrisy and outrageous prices. We are creating a model of cultured and humane relationship between people, we are trying to inculcate consideration, sophistication, humanity in the masses—by means of our music, our cultural events.

(Mitin's interview in: Vylegzhanin, 2012)

Although in this interview Mitin distanced himself and Ziferblat from the political (as he said elsewhere, *'Sometimes I want to do something in Ziferblat in response to certain political events, but I always stop myself'*)⁷⁸, in his public talk at the conference on third places, organised in 2012 in Kiev, where he was invited as the founder of the *'most large-scale third place project in CIS countries'* (the list of speakers also included Oldenburg, who joined via video call from the USA), he explicitly linked the appearance of Ziferblat with the fact that *'Russian authorities don't create any comfortable public spaces—neither in schools, nor in universities, nor in houses of culture, nor in parks, nowhere... public institutions don't need to pay rent, so they should create spaces like Ziferblat, but with free access'* (Mitin's direct speech in: Vazari, 2012); see also his reference to German housing as a positive example of placemaking (p. 79).

Another ever-recurring topic in Mitin's media interviews and public talks in 2011–2012 was the question of Ziferblat's origin, or, rather, originality, which was constantly challenged by journalists and the public.⁷⁹ Although none of them could identify a specific venue or a form of public place, allegedly plagiarised by Mitin, there was a remarkable consensus on the fact that *'this could not have been invented in Russia'*,⁸⁰ in some publications, anti-cafes were explicitly called *'a Western novelty'* (Belova, 2012). This attitude was still persistent in my 2016 interviews with Ziferblat's guests in Moscow—as one of them argued, *'Basically, anti-cafes emulate Europe's cafes'*⁸¹ (interview with Rita, December 2016). To a large extent, this phenomenon comes from the 'Imaginary West' discourse: just like the new Gorky Park, positioned and perceived as a *'world-class'* or a *'European'* park (Kuchuk, 2012) but in reality designed as a hyper-assemblage of the attributes of global urban modernity, Ziferblat was constructed as a heterotopia of compensation for the shortcomings of Russian urban culture, counterposed to the utopia of the 'Imaginary West'.

⁷⁸ Mitin's interview in: Skibiuk, 2014.

⁷⁹ See more about this on p. 94.

⁸⁰ See Mitin's comments in: Mitin, 2012b; Mitin, 2012c.

⁸¹ Presumably, by the 'emulated' features she meant liveliness and the possibility of lingering.

3.3.5. Other placemakers

Defending the originality of Ziferblat, Mitin fiercely criticised other anti-cafes for stealing and compromising his idea and narrowing it down to '*game clubs with Xbox and board games*' where people '*kill time*', '*engaging in empty and meaningless amusement*'; he also blamed his successors for their profit-driven approach, lack of mission and philosophy, poor design ('*dark basements*', '*cheap IKEA furniture*') and for the fact that they '*do not change people in the slightest*' (Mitin, 2012b). These arguments, strikingly akin to the idea of social condenser⁸² and almost literally echoing Krupskaya's criticism of workers' clubs, provide an ironic contrast with Mitin's rejection of the Soviet. His comments also touched upon the cultural clash between Ziferblat as a symbol of 'sophistication' and 'good taste' and other anti-cafes, opened by 'lads' and penetrated with what he considered the elements of lad culture (Xbox, hookah,⁸³ success coaching).⁸⁴ Nevertheless, the analysis of non-Ziferblat anti-cafe discourse of 2011–2013 (see, e.g., Appendix C) demonstrates that many founders, no matter how far they were from Mitin in terms of their class background and geography, were driven by the same—and sometimes even more desperate—desire to find their own niche in the city (opposed to marginal spaces and unwelcoming cafes) and build a local community in a physical space of appearance (opposed to virtual spaces). Some of them saw their anti-cafes as a business, others treated them as a hobby, but both were quite articulate about their mission, in most cases defined as the promotion of 'cultured' leisure. This reference to Soviet placemaking rhetoric is no coincidence—the idea of anti-cafes as the revival of Soviet palaces/houses of culture, abandoned in the 1990s, was another recurrent topic.

After 2015, Mitin handed his CEO role in Ziferblat Worldwide to Alymkulova and focused on a new project—an upscale eco resort outside Moscow. As his new Facebook self-presentation ('*The inventor of the so-called anti-cafe concept*') suggests, he finally came to terms with the fact that Ziferblat gave rise to a whole new category of public places. As for the new Ziferblat CEO, her background and role in this project has never been discussed in the media, apart from just one publication in Forbes

⁸² Note also his comment on '*inculcating consideration, sophistication, humanity in the masses*' on p. 88.

⁸³ Hookah parlours, borrowed from Egyptian and Turkish resorts, became popular among Russian lower and lower-middle class around 2013 and especially after the prohibition of smoking in cafes, restaurants and bars in 2014. Technically, this ban did not apply to anti-cafes, as they are not licensed as public catering spaces, so many hookah parlours preferred to call themselves anti-cafes—although both kind of places operate in a grey zone, the 'anti-cafe' label sounds less suspicious, also allowing for more services under the same roof, e.g., meeting rooms (Semionova, 2015). As a non-Ziferblat anti-cafe owner Oleg Voronov told me, at some point he convinced a few business review websites to exclude hookah parlours from the anti-cafe category (interview, July 2016).

⁸⁴ Success coaching as an attribute of the neoliberal turn is an element of the 1990s–2000s Russian popular culture in general rather than lad culture specifically.

Kazakhstan that focused on Alymkulova rather than Mitin—mostly because of her family links with this country (Zhanalinova, 2014). Nevertheless, my remote ethnography of Treehouse and interviews with Ziferblat team members, including herself, prove that her influence on and contribution to both projects was immense. She was born in 1992 in Moscow in a family with a business background, practiced dance and gymnastics, studied journalism in a university for a year, then, after becoming involved in the Treehouse project, quit and became Mitin's partner in business and life. In sum, as follows from the analysis of her statements, she has always been more commercially oriented than Mitin but at the same time much more open in terms of social inclusion—the difference between their approaches will be highlighted in chapters 5 and 7.

Conclusion

If in 2011–2012 Ziferblat and its first successors were constantly discussed in Russian media as a 'new hot trend', by 2013–2014 anti-cafes spread so widely across the country that their novelty has largely worn off. As Maya, Tverskaya's branch manager, recalls,

When Ziferblat just opened, we had a lot of hipsters because there were just a few cool places in Moscow in 2011, if any at all. We also had a lot of entrepreneurs interested in a new gold mine, a lot of trendies who wanted to check out a new spot... and then, when other people started to go to Ziferblat, everyone was disappointed at first. It felt like we were knocked off Olympus, but, after all, it was cool because we realised that very different people can be our guests. (Interview, July 2016)

This shift in Ziferblat's demographics was not only the shift from 'early adopters' to 'laggards' (Rogers, 1962), but also the shift from people of Mitin's age and older to teenagers and undergraduates, which quickly became characteristic of the entire anti-cafe market in Russia (Shakleina, 2012; Kolerova, 2015). To quote Maya again, after the tariff increase in both Moscow Ziferblats in 2014 this younger group was mostly replaced by twenty-year-olds, but the 'school kids venue' label remained attached to Ziferblat, as well as other Russian anti-cafes. Over the course of the 'urbanism boom' in Russia, many young professionals moved their work and leisure activities to new venues—coworking spaces, renovated libraries and new linger-friendly cafes; many young creatives migrated to more underground and DIY spaces;⁸⁵ most middle-aged

⁸⁵ As my Moscow friend, a cultural activist and contemporary artist, summarised in our informal talk in July 2016, 'Only children go to Ziferblat these days. It's not cool anymore, it's boring, nobody fancies this ready-made space [emphasis added]'. Another remarkable quote belongs to Arsen Nizhnikov, the manager of a Saint Petersburg apartment/restaurant/bar/meeting room, accessible only to those having a key to the venue: 'Ziferblat is a gateway that can lead people to even less mainstream places' (Troyanskaya, 2017).

and older adults stuck with more traditional separation of home, work and leisure activities. In many provincial cities, however, anti-cafes, including Ziferblat branches, still remain the symbol of urban modernity for the local youth (Babayan et al., 2014; Bannikov, 2016).

My research on the historical context of Ziferblat's appearance was driven by two questions: why did this specific form of public space emerge in that specific country at that specific time, and why did it become popular? During my fieldwork in Moscow, I had a chance to hear Ziferblat's guests' reflections in this regard. While the most popular answer was, in summary, *'It was in the air, someone would have come up with it very soon anyway, but Mitin was the first to fulfil this demand'*, some comments linked Ziferblat to such historical spaces as Russian pre-revolutionary aristocratic salons, British gentlemen's clubs and classic European coffeehouses, which suggests that it is seen as a heterotopia of compensation for the loss of the societal cultural and social capital in Soviet and post-Soviet times. Although some people, including Mitin's father, nostalgically associate Ziferblat in particular and anti-cafes in general with Soviet socio-spatial forms (palaces/houses of culture, housing committee clubs, kitchen salons),⁸⁶ Mitin has always rejected such associations, albeit his own approach to placemaking is in many regards akin to the Constructivist idea of the social condenser. At the same time, his idea of Ziferblat embodied more immediate and, to a large extent, global trends (DIY, grassroots, post-digital). As this chapter has shown, his biography predetermined such characteristic dichotomies of Ziferblat as imaginary/real, social/commercial, virtual/physical, global/local; it also had strong implications in terms of Ziferblat's class identity and political orientation.

Speaking of anti-cafes more widely, they seem the most large-scale, bottom-up and democratic project in the entire history of Russian placemaking: it spread nationwide, from big cities to small towns, it had nothing to do with the state or—at least initially—big corporations, and it offered a sheltered (cf. parks) and permanent (cf. film clubs) third place to those not belonging to elitist cliques (cf. creative clusters, intelligentsia clubs) and those whose public activities did not involve or were not limited to eating and drinking (cf. cafes and restaurants). Most importantly, anti-cafes were created by young people for young people—founders got a chance to start their own, even though not very profitable, business without having to deal with corrupted authorities, whereas guests got a home-from-home, leisure and work space which was not supervised or controlled by adults (cf. palaces of culture) but at the same time was safe and civil (cf. marginal spaces and streets). In a way, it was a delayed materialisation of the Soviet

⁸⁶ See, for example, the following publications on Ziferblat: Abrosimov, 2013; Zakharyeva, 2013; Troyanskaya, 2017.

youth cafe movement, crushed in its bud in the 1960s. In further chapters, I will expand this analysis to answer the next question: what made Ziferblat—a form, originating from very specific historical circumstances—a globally relevant phenomenon?

Chapter 4. Constructing otherness: the heterotopology of Ziferblat

In his essay on 'other spaces', Foucault envisioned 'not (...) a science but a sort of systematic description' that would study, analyse and 'read' heterotopias; he called this prospective discipline 'heterotopology' (Foucault, [1967] 2008: 17). Using this term as a guiding analytical principle, the following chapter draws on the core characteristics of heterotopia identified by Foucault and echoed or elaborated in other studies on 'other spaces' (Propp, 1968; Turner, 1982; De Cauter and Dehaene, 2008; Faubion, 2008; Heynen, 2008; Lambert, 2013) to explore the key ideas underlying the reformatory ethos of Ziferblat. More precisely, it aims to scrutinise the multiple dimensions of Ziferblat's otherness, represented in various spatial metaphors and embodied in its physical space and social practices and relations. Section 3.1 examines Ziferblat's intricate relations with other spaces, some of which it attempts to restore (aristocratic club/salon, classic cafe) or improve (contemporary cafe), while others are used as inspiring prototypes (home, social media). Section 3.2 investigates how the combination of spatial and social factors constructs the idea of safe haven in Ziferblat's discourse. Section 3.3 looks at how Ziferblat suspends the everyday, creating a liminal space. Although this chapter analyses many metaphors coined by Mitin to describe the essence of Ziferblat, the discussion in sections 3.2–3.3 is structured around the two most 'heterotopic' ones—'treehouse (for grown-ups)' and 'loose space'.

4.1. Revived and improved: Ziferblat and other spaces

Like any other heterotopia, Ziferblat builds on a range of very specific spaces. Some of them, used by Mitin and his team as inspiring prototypes, are represented or reconstructed in the heterotopia of Ziferblat, whereas others are inverted or rejected. As the chain has been growing, local teams have been contributing to this process of Ziferblat's conceptualisation, sometimes following Mitin's initial metaphors, sometimes rethinking them. Furthermore, media reporters and actual and potential guests of different Ziferblats may or may not perceive these places in the way that was intended by its founder and his colleagues. The key spaces underlying the concept of Ziferblat include the universal archetype of home, various historical and contemporary forms of public places, and the virtual space of social media, all of which will be discussed below.

4.1.1. Historical spaces

As chapter 3 has shown, the appearance and quick growth of anti-cafes in Russia was to a large extent a compensation for the decay of societal social capital in post-Soviet cities. However, unlike many other Russian anti-cafe teams, Ziferblat has never associated itself with Soviet spaces of socialisation and leisure—instead, its imaginary genealogy goes back to classic European social spaces, such as British gentlemen's clubs. When pondering over Treehouse's concept just a couple of weeks before its opening, Mitin dropped a remark in his blog,

We probably won't be able to create a Dionysus Club⁸⁷, but it would be great to allot some space [in The Treehouse] for something like a free library where you can read a book, sipping tea in peace and quiet. (Mitin, 2010a)

Later, when Mitin had to respond to the numerous attempts to dispute his pioneer status after the first Ziferblat's opening, he mentioned the British gentlemen's club among the only two possible—though still with reservations—historical predecessors of Ziferblat. Another one was no less than the ancient Greek agora:

Over the past year, people sent me dozens of links saying 'Hey, look, it's been here for ten years already', but there was nothing more than, like, some Japanese internet cafe where you spend 24 hours and get, like, a Snickers bar as a gift. Or you can say, 'This idea is not new because mobile phones are also paid by time'. I agree that no idea is absolutely new... if you look at history, you'll see that the Greek forum⁸⁸ is quite similar to Ziferblat... congratulations, you caught me, that's plagiarism! (Mitin, 2012c)

Although this statement was slightly cushioned by humour and doubtful tone, Mitin's message is quite clear—it is not its pay-per-minute model that makes Ziferblat distinctive, but its outstanding socialising potential that can be compared only to the highly idealised spaces of the past.

The reference to agora appeared only in a few statements, all by Mitin, whereas the gentlemen's club theme has been very persistent throughout the research, though only in its Russian part; apart from that, Russian staff, guests and media reporters often referred to another elitist club space—Russian pre-revolutionary aristocratic salons:

I'm not sure if there is any term that could be an appropriate category name for Ziferblat... but there are some, more or less suitable ones. Let's say, a club, like those English aristocratic clubs, like in Jeeves and Wooster series.⁸⁹ (Nikita, Pokrovka's host, interview, July 2016)

⁸⁷ Meaning the Diogenes Club from Conan Doyle's novels about Sherlock Holmes.

⁸⁸ Meaning agora.

⁸⁹ Popular British TV series (based on P.G. Woodhouse's *Jeeves* stories), many episodes of which featured the fictional 'Drones Club'.

When I was here the first time, my first thought was, you know, these gentlemen's clubs from English films. Maybe that's why such places started to pop up everywhere—this niche of clubs was unoccupied in Russian cities. (Megrab, Tverskaya's guest, interview, March 2017)

It reminds me of those pre-revolutionary salons where people would gather, play the piano, just like here. (Natalia, Pokrovka's guest, interview, December 2016)

Looking at this, one might wonder why Russians associate Ziferblat with such historical spaces as British gentlemen's clubs and Russian aristocratic parlours, always with a hint of approval and nostalgia, and whether it indicates an elitist sentiment inherently built into Ziferblat. As the further analysis suggests, there is no unambiguous answer to this question. On the one hand, Ziferblat in its Russian version is to a large extent an elitist space, but this elitism, shared by the team and some guests, is based on cultural rather than economic capital—in other words, it implies the supremacy of the cultured and educated rather than the affluent. For a short period of time between 2014 and 2015, Russian-language publications, authorised by Ziferblat Worldwide (Angashanova, 2014; Mitin, 2015b), categorised Ziferblat as a '*social club*'. This definition first appeared in the 2014 English-language version of Ziferblat's website (Ziferblat, 2014a) as an attempt to culturally translate the new concept for international audiences; then it was calqued back to Russian⁹⁰ but did not attach. Trying to make sense of the tangled situation with Ziferblat definitions, I asked Tanya, Pokrovka's host and one of most seasoned veterans of both Ziferblat and Treehouse, whether she finds the term '*social club*' appropriate for Ziferblat. As her answer demonstrates, references to aristocratic spaces help to prevent misunderstandings and assert the social and cultural mission of Ziferblat:

A.K.: What do you think about 'social club' as a definition?

Tanya: Oh, this one I actually like, yes. But, again, there is a problem: when you say 'club', people immediately associate it with nightclubs and whatnot⁹¹. So, yes, sometimes I describe Ziferblat as a club, but I always specify, 'It's like an early twentieth-century club'.

A.K.: Like a salon?

Tanya: Yes, yes, like the salon of Anna Pavlovna Scherer.⁹²
(Interview, July 2016)

⁹⁰ The expression *sotsialnyi klub* (the calque of '*social club*') is not very common in Russia; it mostly appears in fiction and nonfiction literature translated from English. If one is to properly adapt this term for a Russian audience, they would most likely end up using the word '*club*' with a certain modifier (e.g., *knizhnyi klub*—'*book club*') or a more general expression *klub po interesam* ('*special interest club*'), though the latter has Soviet connotations with hobby clubs and does not cover all types of social clubs (not all of them are formed around a common interest).

⁹¹ See p. 66 ('pulled a model').

⁹² One of the characters of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*.

On the other hand, this motif can be interpreted as a manifestation of Ziferblat's orientation towards European culture, symbolised by the nostalgic images of the British upper class and the Russian westernised aristocracy.⁹³ Yet the lack of references to other historical spaces might simply stem from the fact that British gentlemen's clubs and Russian Tsarist salons are well-represented in popular culture and therefore more familiar to the founder, staff, guests and media commentators, who might have been unable to immediately come up with any other examples of informal, noninstitutional forms of social association.

Notably, the metaphor of the gentlemen's club almost never came up in the data related to Ziferblat's opening in the UK, except for two comments from Russian-speaking Londoners—a guest, who called Ziferblat 'a true club, in the English sense of the word, but more open and diverse' (cited from: Krasilnikova, 2014), and the Old Street branch's manager, who argued that Ziferblat perfectly fits into the abandoned niche of the English social clubs, but not gentlemen's ones:

It closely resembles the old English social club which doesn't really exist anymore in its original form. Those clubs for the working class people, teachers, related to different trade unions—it's very similar to us. Music instruments, tea, coffee, board games... Ziferblat is a social club, as a matter of fact. (Alex, interview, November 2016)

An attempt to define whether this difference results from Old Street's greater inclusivity, as compared to Moscow Ziferblats, or the Russian anglophiles' insensitivity to the classist side of their fascination with gentlemen's clubs, coming from their limited knowledge of British culture, would probably pose the risk of overinterpretation. Nevertheless, both factors seem to have had their impact on this remarkable absence of the references to the upper-class spaces in the English part of the data, including not only Old Street but also the Manchester branch. The UK staff and guests (media reporters for some reason chose to refrain from historical analogies) compared Ziferblat to more inclusive spaces, such as pubs and caffs:

The closest thing I can compare this to is a pub. That's kind of what pubs are supposed to... otherwise it's called a public house, because it's supposed to feel like... with the big plush sofas and pictures on the walls and TV and darts... it just feels like a place is like home but for people to hang out. Ziferblat is not focused on alcohol but you've still got community... people hanging out in a social space but in a way that is more wholesome. (Bryan, Old Street's guest, interview, February 2017)

Third space theory is nothing new, you know, Brits used to use the pub, a lot of American areas used barbershops... you see the old classic, British comedy or something like that, there's normally a cafe or a pub or

⁹³ The opening paragraph of the Russian version of *War and Peace*, featuring the conversation in the above-mentioned salon of Anna Pavlovna Scherer, is written in French, which reflects the Tsarist nobility's language etiquette.

something that was used as a sort of a friendly inclusive cheap local place where everyone came and it was between home and work... that's what we're trying to achieve in its purest form. (Ben, ZUKI's CMO, Edge Street, September 2016)

Unlike the ZUKI team,⁹⁴ Mitin was not familiar with the concept of third place when he opened his first Ziferblat (Mitin, 2012d), but in his post-factum reflections he brought up a few facts from Oldenburg's book and presented Ziferblat as the revival of the classic coffeehouse:

The cafe appeared in England in the sixteenth or seventeenth century (...). It was something like Ziferblat—people gathered to discuss the news and drink coffee. (...) Striving for profit, coffeehouses' owners started to formalise this form—this is how what we now call the traditional cafe appeared. In a traditional cafe, someone wearing a uniform waits on you and you sit there, ignoring everyone and everything outside your table. (...) In a way, what we do in Ziferblat is the return to the cafe's true nature. (Mitin's interview in: Fahrutdinov, 2015)

Some Russian guests also described Ziferblat as the return to the 'true essence of the cafe':

There were such historical phenomena as those Viennese coffeehouses where people would gather and discuss things... or Eastern⁹⁵ tea rooms and coffeehouses. It's a very important component of urban environment. But in Moscow, this niche was unoccupied... not only in Moscow, by the way. I live in Munich now, and there is also a lack of spaces where people could just gather [emphasis added—A.K.]. (Megrab, interview, Tverskaya, March 2017)

What were the first cafes for, originally? For people to come there and talk, not like in a bakery [emphasis added—A.K.]. It was a place where people were treated as equals, just paid for their coffee and talked. Here, it's almost the same. Ziferblat restores the very essence of the cafe, of what a cafe was intended for. You can come here and have a chat with a person who is thirty years older than you. Here, there are no walls between people. (Roman, Pokrovka's guest, interview, December 2016)

Depending on various factors (inter-branch variations, cultural differences, speaker's knowledge), people associate Ziferblat with more exclusive (e.g., gentlemen's clubs and aristocratic salons) or more inclusive (working-class clubs, pubs, cafes) historical spaces. Nevertheless, all these spatial metaphors represent Ziferblat as a space of restoration and accumulation of societal cultural and social capital. While the cultural dimension of this mission is more typical for Russian Ziferblats, constructed as the spaces for the educated and taking over from the refined culture of Tsarist nobility, social capital restoration and accumulation function featured as internationally relevant. Both Russian and UK staff and guests see Ziferblat as a project that re-stitches the

⁹⁴ Their COO, Gareth, also referred to the theory of third place in his interview (October, 2016).

⁹⁵ Meaning Middle East and Central Asia.

city's social fabric by coming back to the roots of contemporary public places (first and foremost cafes but also pubs) and reframing their primary function as socialisation rather than eating and drinking.

4.1.2. Home

Taking after Treehouse, Ziferblat has drawn on the idea of home from the very beginning of this project. Arguably, it is the cultural universality of this archetype that made it the most popular spatial association in Ziferblat discourse, irrespective of the branch or speaker's status, as both Russian and UK staff, guests and media commenters unanimously used this reference in their reflections on Ziferblat. Nevertheless, home is a multifaceted concept—it is not only a physical place but also an idea, an imaginary, a set of emotions, feelings, practices and power relations (Rubenstein, 2001; Mallett, 2004; Blunt, 2005; Blunt and Dowling, 2006; Mah, 2009). In his very first statement framing Treehouse as a home (rather than a club, as it was planned initially) Mitin drew a distinction between such attributes of home as cosiness and hospitality and non-profit driven economic relations, based on sharing and participation:

We want to make a place where one would feel like home. By this I mean not only cosiness and friendly hosts but also sustaining it together. Yes, we paid the rent and furnished the space, but we don't want people to pay for food and entertainment here like they do in restaurants. You don't pay your grandma when she cooks borscht for you, do you? But you buy beetroots and other ingredients for her, or you help her cook. That's the system we want to try. You come here to socialise or be on your own, play the piano, read a book, listen to music, have some tea and cookies—you bring something yummy or help us cook it, and you donate some money when you leave so that we could pay the rent. Roughly speaking, it's like we all rent a flat together to gather and hang out. (Mitin, 2010c)

As this fragment illustrates, the metaphor of home encloses three different types of relationship—between (a) hosts and guests, (b) family members or (c) housemates—each of which entails different power dynamics. This multiplicity of meanings, along with the overall ambiguity of Treehouse's status as a private space opened up for public use but, unlike other semi-public spaces, not structured by commercial relations, caused a lot of misunderstandings, debates and conflicts about who and what sort of behaviour is welcome in this space and how much one should pay for a visit (Treehouse, n.d.).

In Ziferblat, the idea of home crystallised into two more specific metaphors—'public living room' and 'micro-tenancy'. The former, bridging the gap between the public and private space, was used as an indication of Ziferblat's cosiness and sociability, whereas the latter represented Mitin's attempt to reconfigure the staff/customer power

dynamic typical for the traditional cafe culture and replace consumption with participation, temporary ownership and shared responsibility:

[In traditional cafes], you want service. You're looking at how they treat you because you're paying money for that. In Ziferblat, you don't pay money for service. Nobody serves you; you help yourselves. By paying for time... you participate in the existence of this space, so it's like we all rent this space together. (Mitin's direct speech in: Allen, 2014)

Ziferblat's doors are open to everyone. Each Ziferblat guest becomes a micro-tenant of the space, responsible for it and able to influence its life. You will be welcomed by the Ziferblat community and able to work with them to help create, support, and develop this project. Everything is free inside except the time you spend there; and by paying for the time; you'll be making a donation towards the further development of this social experiment. (Kickstarter, 2014)

In chapter 5, I will discuss how these two metaphors, as well as other dimensions of the general metaphor of home, are perceived and lived by Ziferblat's staff and guests in different branches, and to what extent their interpretations and practices comply with Mitin's initial vision.

4.1.3. Social media

The idea of Ziferblat as 'social media in real life', apparently coined by one of Mitin's LiveJournal followers in response to his call for assistance in finding a proper definition for Ziferblat (*'It is a physical space but, in fact, you created a real-time social network of people where Ziferblats are servers, so I suggest "social network"'*)⁹⁶, was later elaborated by Mitin and turned into one of the key formulae he used as Ziferblat's descriptors. This metaphor draws on quite an ambivalent attitude towards the physical/digital dichotomy. On the one hand, as a digital native, Mitin sees internet and social media as a heterotopia of compensation that is more sociable, inclusive, easily accessible and democratic than the existing physical public places:

Fundamentally, Ziferblat is an offline network, based on the same principles [as the online ones]. I've been using internet since 1994, so I'm very keen on the idea of the free communication unconstrained by geographical boundaries and social barriers. (Mitin's direct speech in: Vazari, 2012)

I have grown up with internet and transferred this philosophy to Ziferblat—this openness, like in social media. (...) There were some cool places—coworking spaces, cafes, some cliquish non-profit places, but there was no space that would have been open and friendly to everyone by default. I think, people are longing for openness, they want to overcome social disconnection imposed on us by the whole history of humanity. There is a new generation of people affected by the internet culture where there are no social barriers—you can send a message to anyone, 'like' a post, join a

⁹⁶ User's comment in Mitin's blog, see in: Mitin, 2012a.

group. They got this example of freedom and openness, now they want such relationships in real life. (Mitin's interview in: Sanduliak, 2013)

Furthermore, he argues that the Ziferblat's multifunctionality and participative potential, distinguishing it from other public places, was also inspired by Web 2.0:

Ziferblat lets people be in a social network in real life, get together, breaking free from formalities. Cafes, cultural centres and other kinds of public places are stuck in the pre-internet era; they can't provide people with variability and freedom of choice. That's why we constantly change everything in Ziferblat, rearrange the furniture, accept our guests' suggestions—for instance, about the events. It's a platform for experiments—not only for us but also for our guests. (Mitin's interview in: Gurova, 2012).

On the other hand, the idea behind Ziferblat was to compensate for the lack of 'true', i.e. face-to-face interaction in social media by 'connecting' strangers and, overall, 'bringing people offline and replacing virtual communication with real one' (Mitin's direct speech in: Rais, 2012). As chapter 3 has shown, this intention might be interpreted as a manifestation of a wider attempt of Russian civil society to move from the online communities to the physical 'spaces of appearance'. However, this post-digital sentiment turned out to be no less relevant for the international audience. Despite the fact that Mitin incorporated the 'social media in real life' formula in almost each and every English interview on Ziferblat's opening in London, the reporters were mostly engaged with the very idea of paying for time rather than drinks and food, whereas many internet commenters fastened on the idea of the restoration of unmediated sociality, lamenting that '*most cafes these days are full of people in their own little worlds with their electronic devices protecting them from contact with others*' and praising the concept of Ziferblat as '*it gets people actually conversing with others again rather than chatting to each other via social media*' (see comments in: Baker, 2014; Keeley, 2014).

The subsequent fate of the metaphor of social media in real life is a particularly illustrative example of how Mitin's vision is sometimes contested not only by media and guests but also by local teams. Whereas the Ziferblat Worldwide team still sometimes describes Ziferblat as a physical embodiment of the digital culture (Alymkulova's direct speech in: Troyanovskaya, 2017), my interviews with Old Street's staff suggest that they have never heard of this idea, even though the phrase 'social media in real life' appeared in all major media publications about this specific branch. When I briefly explained to one of the hosts what Mitin meant by this metaphor and asked him if he thinks this is relevant for the Old Street branch, he said,

It is, in a way, but I have issue with this idea. I'd say Facebook is like a drip-down version of this, rather than this is a version of that. Human beings are made to interact in person. This isn't an attempt to have that level of

connectiveness in real life, this is an attempt to go beyond that or any previous level of connectiveness and communication in real life. I think, yeah, okay, right kind of move, I understand why he references that, because social media was a big thing in the last twelve years but I think if you want to really talk about what the heart of what Ziferblat is, you need to look past—what has been interesting and popular and relevant—and look to what is going to be interesting. (Evan, Old Street's host, interview, July 2016)

Though Evan explicitly contested the founder's view, his idea is in fact not that much different from what Mitin intended to achieve with Ziferblat. Both draw on the idealised images of the pre-digital sociality, but at the same time seek to go beyond it. In the light of this, it can be argued that Ziferblat was designed as a post-digital initiative that borrows some principles from digital culture but at the same time cherishes unmediated face-to-face sociability in a public setting.

The ZUKI team, albeit not referring to the concept of social media in real life in their external communication, turned out to be more sympathetic to Mitin's idea. That said, they approached it from a consumer trend-watching rather than ideological mission-seeking angle:

I think, one of the things with digital technology... it's really interesting, the way that that's changing, the way people socialise. Because lots of people say it's bad, lots of people say it's good, you know... I think, it's a mix of both... For example, we've got a group of forty people who come in and do knitting workshops all weekend... people fly from America to come and do this two-day workshop for knitting. Without things like the internet and social media, you wouldn't have been able to connect all these people or it would have been less cost effective [emphasis added—A.K.]... We call ourselves 'Facebook in the real world' because you're in this space that feels domestic, feels comfortable, and there is communal kitchen... And one of the things, I think, is that that's not a solution that's served by many other providers at the moment [emphasis added—A.K.]. (Ben, ZUKI's CMO, interview, Edge Street, September 2016)

Although the idea of Ziferblat as a social media in real life (unlike more general reflections on how Ziferblat compensates for the lack of face-to-face communication in the contemporary city) were almost completely absent from the guests' interviews in all four branches, in chapter 7 I will use this metaphor as an analytical framework for the exploration of social interaction and community building in Ziferblat.

Summarising the above, the heterotopia of Ziferblat draws on various forms of physical public places, both historical and contemporary, and their digital descendant—social media. Seeking to overcome the limitations of contemporary public places—first and foremost, cafes—Mitin attempted to make them more sociable (the classic coffeehouse, social media) and cultured (aristocratic clubs and salons); more open, flexible and multifunctional (social media); more comfortable, friendly, and less profit-

driven (home); and, finally, more participative (home, social media). In chapter 5 and 7, I will discuss how these spatial metaphors are perceived and lived by Ziferblat's staff and guests in Russia and the UK.

4.2. 'A treehouse for grown-ups': Ziferblat as a safe haven

The idea of heterotopia as a safe haven (or sanctuary, or asylum, or refuge, or shelter) actualises in Ziferblat's overarching metaphor of treehouse, inherited from the actual place called Treehouse. Apart from that, Ziferblat is often literally described as a '*nice cosy shelter*' (Kickstarter, 2014), '*hideaway for everyone*' (Indiegogo, 2016), or even a '*sanctuary*' (ZLHG, 2015). In what follows, I will discuss the origin and meaning of this metaphor in Ziferblat discourse.

4.2.1. The architecture of refuge

At first glance, the image of safe haven results from the fact that ever since Treehouse was opened, most Ziferblat branches, as well as other anti-cafes, are typically located in marginal zones—attics, basements, non-ground floors, rear entrances, residential or office buildings steered away from pedestrian traffic and/or having a buzz-in access system. However, as Hilde Heynen states in her summary of the current studies on heterotopia, most authors see spatial form as an important but not decisive ingredient of 'other spaces'; it is rather the actual use, meaning and interpretation of specific spatial articulations that makes them heterotopic (Heynen, 2008: 313-314). That said, closer analysis of the treehouse metaphor reveals more complex relationships between the spatial and the social in Ziferblat discourse.

When Mitin was looking for a property to implement his first placemaking project, initially envisioned as a middle to large-sized, moderately priced and linger-friendly club somewhere in the city centre (Mitin, 2010a), he opted for the very first search result that complied with the desired district and rent price. Even though this property was much smaller than planned, Mitin was very excited by its unassuming and unconventional location and configuration—at the very heart of a vibrant neighbourhood in Moscow's historical centre but hidden in a quiet courtyard, in an attic of a residential building, shielded by tall trees and accessible only through a spiral staircase:

We wanted to open a large club but then I figured that a small one would be not bad either. Everyone advised against it but I decided to view this property. When I came along, I fell for it at first sight and told the owner that we're ready to sign the lease. I risked losing my partners but when they arrived on the site, it melted their hearts, and it was unanimously agreed that our place will be located here! Just imagine, a small cosy courtyard, a

spiral staircase, a terrace leading to the venue, tall lime trees hugging this treehouse... aww, what a hidden gem. Hooray! I'm so happy. (Mitin, 2010b)

In about two months, this first metaphoric use of the word 'treehouse' became the actual, capitalised name of this place. The property's size (52 m²) and legal status (office lease, no licence for catering), as well as the neighbour's constant complaints about noise nuisance quickly shaped this venue into a cliquey, '*not-for-everyone*' space, purified from smoking and alcohol consumption and based on an alternative economy, intended to make it '*free from financial relationships*' (Mitin, 2010e). Notwithstanding the fact that Treehouse was to a large extent the product of non-spatial factors (i.e. Mitin's personal inclination for social engineering), the spatial characteristics of this venue also had a significant impact on sharpening its heterotopic features. One of the most amusing examples is how the neighbour's complaints resulted in the following rule, requiring the Treehouse's guests to take a vow of silence in the courtyard, which must have felt like a rite of passage to a heterotopia: '*Please remain silent until you open the magic door of Treehouse*' (Treehouse, n.d.).

Furthermore, these spatial and non-spatial factors are not easily separable. According to Doreen Massey, whose scholarship seems to have been overlooked in the above-mentioned debates on the dialectic of the social and the spatial in heterotopia, 'it is not spatial form in itself (nor distance, nor movement) that has effects, but the spatial form of particular and specified social processes and social relationships' (Massey, 1984: 5). If Pocket Poetry group had not been repeatedly expelled from Moscow's cafes, Mitin would not have needed to open Treehouse. If he and his friend and colleague Anevskiy had not had a chance to see cooperative cafes and community spaces in European cities, Treehouse might not have become a pay-what-you-want venue. If people who opened Treehouse had had more financial resources, their rental options would not have been limited to marginal zones with cheaper rent and they might have ended up opening a club as it was initially planned.

After about a year since its opening, Mitin started to refer to Treehouse as the realisation of his childhood dream:

Treehouse—this name comes from childhood. Perhaps everyone once had a secret treehouse known only to you and your friends. You would come there to play, talk, share secrets. Treehouse is a secret place too; there are no signs around, you just enter the courtyard, go up the spiral staircase, and walk through the door. (Mitin's interview in: Borzenko, 2011)

Due to the nature of the Soviet housing system where urban dwellers were accommodated in densely populated apartment blocks, treehouses have never served

as traditional children's spaces in Russian cities.⁹⁷ Instead of a treehouse, constructed by someone's parent(s) on a privately owned land for this specific kid and his or her guests, Russian children would typically use attics or basements of their apartment blocks, squat adjacent maintenance buildings or construct hideaway dens in hidden nooks of their courtyards (Osorina, 2008), which suggests that Mitin's dream was most likely spurred by English literature or films he grew up on. In light of this, the spatial metaphor of treehouse can be interpreted as yet another evidence of how the heterotopia of Ziferblat was to a large extent inspired by the 'Imaginary West'.

One is unlikely to define precisely whether Mitin chose that attic because it embodied his childhood fantasy or whether he just played up the treehouse metaphor in his subsequent comments, but it is remarkable how this idea was later applied to Ziferblat—first to Pokrovka branch, then to the whole chain, even though none of the Ziferblat branches, unlike the actual Treehouse, physically resembles a treehouse. Not only was it reframed into a 'we-statement' redefining customers as participants, but it also appealed to a universally shared 'back-to-childhood' sentiment as Ziferblat expanded to the UK and became a global chain:

Everyone wishes to get back to the fairytale of the childhood. (...) Being kids, we all dreamed about our own space where we can hide away from the stupid rules of the grown-up society. Some kids were building treehouses; what we do is quite the same thing. We build a treehouse; all the people, who come here, develop this project, they participate in it.
(Mitin's direct speech in: Taylor, 2014; Kickstarter, 2014)

The other side of this metaphor, i.e., the idea of childishness in Treehouse and Ziferblat, will be analysed in more detail in subsection 4.3.5.

4.2.2. Our cities, ourselves: the dimensions of escapism

Upon further analysis, both Treehouse and Ziferblat embody and reinforce a whole range of escapist sentiments shared by their staff and guests. But what exactly are they trying to escape from?

First, Treehouse and Ziferblat are often seen as 'a shelter from tough reality' (Mitin's comment in: Treehouse, n.d.), 'an escape from the modern world' (user's comment in: Ibid.), or even a drug:

The sensation of leaving here and walking out into the street is a tangible change that people describe like a drug comedown. Because you go from the high levels of oxytocin and feeling safe and warm to going out into a

⁹⁷ See, for example, a very typical media publication describing this foreign tradition as completely new for Russian culture (Pavlov, 2017).

street of drunken, shouting, violent people. (Evan, Old Street's host, interview, July 2016)

Some people come here to escape from themselves... I guess, I'm one of those trying to escape from themselves, from reality... Ziferblat is like an opium for the masses. (Suren, Tverskaya's guest, interview, March 2017)

It must be noted, though, that such an affective attitude is common only for those staff and guests who feel strong emotional attachment to the space, which is not always the case. A more widely shared sentiment can be summarised by the following quote, where Ziferblat's mission is worded in a way which somewhat resembles Simmel's ([1903] 2002) critique of the modern metropolitan life:

[Ben Davis says,] 'We're trying to create venues that are designed for modern life and modern business interactions. We offer Ziferblat users a break from the world.' [As the founder Ivan Mitin said,] 'Our mission is to create a place conducive to people to feeling free, devoid of the pressures of modern living.' (Media report on ZUKI, see in: Willis, 2016)

Indeed, most statements describing Treehouse and Ziferblat as a safe haven see it as a hideaway not just from reality in general but from the city life with its bustle ('a cosy place where you can disconnect from the city buzz'⁹⁸), atomisation and blasé attitude ('a shelter from the soulless, monstrous, cold, tough and ruthless city'⁹⁹), physical discomfort ('outdoors it's hot—here it's chilly; outdoors it's crowded—here it's spacious; outdoors it's cold—here we have blankets; outdoors you feel thirsty—we always have some lemonade')¹⁰⁰ and, as Evan's quote above pointed out, potential violence.

Nevertheless, in staff and guests' views, each Ziferblat is only seemingly counterposed to the specific city or district where it is located, whereas the cross-case analysis demonstrates that Ziferblat is conceived and perceived as the other of the city per se, which resonates with David Graham Shane's (2005: 231) definition of heterotopia as a space that 'houses all exceptions to the dominant city model'. In their reflections on Ziferblat, people—be it Muscovites, Londoners or Mancunians, often very fond and proud of their cities—tend to describe *the city* as a 'built version of Leviathan and Mammon, mapping the power of the bureaucratic machine or the social pressures of money' (Zukin, 1995: 1). The following quote is a telling example of this anti-metropolis sentiment:

[Ziferblat is] a space that is really meant to be anti-London, or, like, a retreat from London, escape from London... London is amazing, you wouldn't live here if you didn't love it, but it's also tiring, it's a role, a posture, it's hard, it's much harder to live in London than anywhere else in the UK. It's the best of times and it's the worst of times. And so this place is like a... almost a safe

⁹⁸ Self-description of Tverskaya on a city guide website (A-a-ah, 2012).

⁹⁹ Users' comments in Treehouse's Vkontakte group, 2012-2013 (Treehouse, n.d.).

¹⁰⁰ Admins' post in the Pokrovka's Vkontakte group (Ziferblat Pokrovka, 2016a).

haven from worst of times in London when you need it. (Sara, Old Street's host, interview, August 2016)

Despite all this rhetoric of refuge-seeking, Ziferblat is not entirely secluded from the city. While there is a tendency in heterotopia studies to interpret heterotopia as an enclave (Heynen, 2008: 311), Foucault himself ([1967] 2008: 17) insisted that such spaces are 'localisable' and 'written into the institution of society'—or, as an urban geographer would say, written into the city. To quote Massey again, 'definition [of a place] does not have to be through simple counterposition to the outside; it can come, in part, precisely through the particularity of linkage to that 'outside' which is therefore itself part of what constitutes the place' (Massey, 1991: 29). As chapter 6 will show, each Ziferblat's venue to a varying extent adopts the identity of the city, or district, or neighbourhood, or building where it is located. Moreover, looking ahead to chapter 5, not only is Ziferblat written into the functional structure of the city but it is also intended to rethink this structure and, as subsection 4.3.4 will demonstrate, foster some wider transformations in the urban economy.

4.2.3. The power of looking down

A treehouse is first and foremost a hideaway but it is also an observation point. At first glance, it might seem that Ziferblat is not that much removed from traditional cafes, typically described as places for seeing and being seen by others (Oosterman, 1992; Montgomery, 1997; Tjora and Scambler, 2013) but at the same time providing 'a refuge, a solitary and secluded corner in which to bury oneself, a means to escape (...) offering a barrier between a hassled self and a transitory or generically hostile or threatening social world' (Scambler, 2013: 80). In reality, though, Ziferblat offers protection from a wider range of the downsides of the city life than cafes do (including the downsides of cafes themselves). However, in order to get this protection, one has to overcome more boundaries than in the case of a cafe.

In their external communication and staff and guests' interviews, Ziferblat and, even more so, Treehouse are represented as secret, hidden places with a certain 'system of opening and closing' (Foucault, [1967] 2008: 21), isolated from some visitors and penetrable for others. The following quote demonstrates the power of those sitting in a hideaway and looking down—both literally and figuratively—at the outsiders:

When I look out the window of Ziferblat here, I want to grab every single person and invite them in, which I sometimes do. When I looked out the window in Pokrovka, I would want to invite only a few. The number of nice and peculiarly looking people living in London is amazing. (Mitin's interview in: Ilyina, 2013)

In a less blatant form, such observation takes place when a new visitor rings the video doorbell, which is the case in Old Street and Edge Street (Tverskaya has an audio intercom, Pokrovka has no doorbell). In fairness, to my knowledge, these technologies, stemming from the location and type of properties typically rented by Ziferblat and other anti-cafes, are never used to prevent someone specific from entering the venue. The Old Street staff rarely look at the screen when answering the door; moreover, they often ask guests sitting next to the buzzer to press the button. The Edge Street team, despite accompanying their video doorbell with a CCTV system (one camera inside the venue and another one watching the street), did it only for general security purposes. In Tverskaya branch, Ziferblat staff do not have access to the intercom at all—the front door is answered by a security officer servicing the whole building. No matter how, why and to what extent guests are being ‘screened’ at the entrance, the very fact of having to buzz in creates a barrier—psychological rather than physical but nonetheless powerful. The phrase *‘Finally, I picked up the courage and walked in’* was strikingly frequent in guests’ and staff’s memories of their first visits to Ziferblat, regardless of the branch, and, earlier, to Treehouse.

Another recurrent motif was the perception of Ziferblat as a hidden gem and the unwillingness to share it with the wider public, which is typical not only for long-term regulars, getting nostalgic about the days when it was less crowded (*‘It was much cosier’*)¹⁰¹, and more recent loyal guests, being very selective about the people they bring in (*‘It’s only those who we trust, who we want to stay friends with’*)¹⁰², but also for those newcomers who just discovered Ziferblat (*‘I’d like this place to stay a secret club’*).¹⁰³ The manifestations of this sentiment and its consequences become more complicated when it comes to staff. Even though the above-cited fragment from Mitin’s interview illustrates his symbolic rather than actual power over Ziferblat’s guests (i.e., he could not explicitly forbid those who do not look *‘nice and peculiar’* to come in), his and other team members’ ideas about who is entitled to be in this safe haven and who is to be kept out are embodied in Ziferblat’s policies, working as hidden filters. The most obvious of them, alcohol ban, will be discussed in the next section; other instrument—targeted advertising, staff/customer communication, design, cultural policy—will be addressed in further chapters.

¹⁰¹ Interview with Viktor, Tverskaya, March 2017.

¹⁰² Interview with Pyotr and Roman, Pokrovka, December 2016.

¹⁰³ Interview with Ted and Kara, Edge Street, March 2017.

4.2.4. Alcohol ban—a shield or a magnet?

As it was mentioned in chapter 3, the alcohol ban, initially introduced in Treehouse as a necessitated rather than desired placemaking solution, quickly became acknowledged as a security measure and audience filter and then, inherited by Ziferblat, turned into one of the key features of the new type of public place called anti-cafe. Each and every person I interviewed in all four Ziferblats—both staff and guests—unanimously and wholeheartedly approved of this policy. That said, the motives behind this approval were very different for Russian and UK branches. The attitude of Russian staff and guests can be summarised in the following two quotes:

Primarily, it's a filter. It's not like we are against drinking... but if a person is ready to put alcohol aside in order to get into this place, then it's our kind of person¹⁰⁴. I guess, it's not impossible [to bring people together without banning alcohol]... there was wine at Kinosreda gatherings... I guess, they used some other means to filter people. Anyway, the most important thing [in such projects] is to avoid mixing non like-minded people together. (Gleb, Ziferblat Worldwide's CTO and Treehouse's ex-host, interview, Pokrovka, July 2016)

If alcohol was allowed here, most people would just stop going here—who would want to hang out with outcasts? If I came here and noticed someone drunk, I would just leave. You come here to relax. There is enough drunk people on the streets. (Roman, Pokrovka's guest, interview, December 2016)

Such reflections, echoed by many staff and guests in Pokrovka and Tverskaya, demonstrate how alcohol consumption, despite not being criticised per se, is stigmatised when it comes to the wider public as an indicator of the 'uncultured' and potentially dangerous people wandering around the city outside Ziferblat, allegedly preparing to invade this safe haven and, as Mitin once put it, '*kill the atmosphere*' (interview in: Turovskiy, 2014).¹⁰⁵

Contrastingly, in the UK context Ziferblat is mostly seen as an alternative to pubs and bars, perceived as prevailing in Britain's urban culture. If Russian staff and guests see the alcohol ban as a shield, protecting Ziferblat from 'undesirables', their British peers tend to consider the exclusion of alcohol as an instrument of social inclusion. In Edge Street, many of those using the space for solo work or business meetings, positively commented on the fact that it is also suitable for family leisure, '*because sometimes kids are not really welcome in pubs and this sort of places*' (interview with Susanne, March 2017). Another side of the alcohol ban was brought to my attention by Tracey,

¹⁰⁴ Note also how the use of heterotopic rhetoric ('*ready to put aside*'; '*our kind of person*') turns alcohol ban into a rite of passage to Ziferblat.

¹⁰⁵ This attitude is very typical for Russian placemaking projects of the 2010s (cf. Zhelnina, 2012a; Kviat, 2014b).

the branch manager; among other regulars, she mentioned a community of young Muslims who often spend their Friday and Saturday evenings in Ziferblat—chatting, playing board games, listening to music—simply because they are otherwise excluded from Manchester’s evening economy. Unlike their age-mates hanging out in Moscow city centre,¹⁰⁶ they have few to zero alternatives to Ziferblat in terms of non-alcoholic socialising spaces available after 6-7 p.m. As Tracey continues, keeping alcohol out of the venue opens it up for recovering addicts and other vulnerable groups, thereby making Ziferblat more inclusive (this argument was also highlighted by Old Street’s hosts, Sara and Kevin):

We’ve had a lot of groups that use the space for workshops. We’ve even had people that are previously alcoholics, and they’ve used one of the rooms to meet up, so they can all sit and talk... Also there’s been the lady who runs a charity for mental illness—she uses the space, this room, for instance,¹⁰⁷ to have sessions with people that need counselling. So, when you’ve got such sensitive subjects, I think, mixing alcohol into it is not really that... so, we have a strict policy on that. (Interview with Tracey, Edge Street branch manager, November 2016)

4.2.5. ‘A moral almshouse’

Drawing on De Cauter and Dehaene’s (2008: 97) metaphorical definition of heterotopia as a space open ‘to those for which (...) the city walls are closed’, can we say that this applies to Ziferblat? Artem, a regular of both Pokrovka and Tverskaya, in his interview called Ziferblat a ‘*moral almshouse*’. As he elaborated,

There are a lot of people who don’t feel comfortable in a normal environment. Because they are not normal. When they were kids, they might have had their special interests, their community, their circle of friends, and then they, for whatever reason, dropped out of it... or maybe their mind is so agile that they don’t feel comfortable in regular spaces... or around those people whose minds are normal. That’s how they end up here. (Interview, Pokrovka, December 2016)

Leaving aside one slightly elitist implication of this statement (‘*normal*’ vs. ‘*agile*’ minds), to which I will get back in subsection 4.3.2, the idea of Ziferblat as an asylum for socially marginalised people can be linked to the observation made by Thompson and Arsel (2004: 638): ‘For individuals who often feel out of place in mainstream society and politically marginalized, the antiestablishment trappings of bohemian coffee shops communicate an inviting tolerance of alternative lifestyles and support of their political ideologies.’ Similarly, Maya, Tverskaya’s branch manager, described Ziferblat

¹⁰⁶ Most of Moscow’s coffeeshops are open till at least 10-11 p.m.; many of them stay open 24x7. The same (and even more so) applies to anti-cafes.

¹⁰⁷ This comment implied that, while privately booked events held in Edge Street’s meeting rooms may or may not involve alcohol, having it in the main space would be inappropriate.

as a space that *'helps people'*, implying those being at a crossroads, on the edge, in trouble, or just precarious:

Someone comes here because they have troubled relationships with their mom, like she forbids them to hang out... Some people find their family here. Others tank energy for opening a new chapter in their life. For those who come here, Ziferblat is first and foremost a retreat, a safe haven, a quiet bay where you can hide, do what you need to do, bud quietly and then burst into blossom. At some point, everyone changes radically. (Interview, July 2016)

Maya's vision strikingly echoes with that of Evan, an Old Street host:

Anybody who deals with change—that's the best summary I can give. Whether that's somebody who's learning something in university, or somebody who's changed a job, or left a relationship, or trying to change the world or build a business, or thinking for themselves—whatever way it is, if you are learning, if you are changing, if you are breaking down your assumptions about the world or you understand that life changes—any of those people do very well here. (Interview, July 2016)

Overall, these two quotes reflect the wide range of meanings attached to the idea of Ziferblat as a safe haven. While some guests use this space as a break from the general pressures of modern city life, for others—unsettled or troubled teenagers and adults—it might become a more literal sanctuary. In further chapters, I will revisit this theme in the context of two other metaphors used in Ziferblat discourse—home (chapter 5) and social media in real life (chapter 7)—and critically interrogate the idea of a safe haven with regard to the issues of diversity and social inclusion in Ziferblat (chapter 7).

4.3. Magic, odd, rebellious: Ziferblat as a liminal space

Commenting on his initial idea of Ziferblat as a space that brings together *'people with different ethical and aesthetic backgrounds'*, Mitin draws a difference between everyday life where *'common people'* rarely rub shoulders with *'intellectuals, creatives, intelligentsia'*, and a camping situation:

*Imagine 20 strangers going camping together. In just one week, they would sit together by the fire and talk. A plumber would be chatting with a PhD, an electrician—with a philologist, a loader—with an artist.*¹⁰⁸ (Mitin's interview in: Skibiuk, 2014)

Although later in the same interview he admits that this utopia never actually came true (see p. 162), this metaphor of camping demonstrates that Ziferblat was constructed as a liminal space, where the everyday is temporarily suspended, which creates 'a realm

¹⁰⁸ In Russian culture, 'plumber', 'electrician' and 'loader', as well as many other working class jobs, are persistent stigmas coming from Soviet times. These words are typically used to describe an uneducated, uncultured, unsuccessful, and/or heavy-drinking person.

of instability and possibility' (De Cauter and Dehaene, 2008: 96). Indeed, Ziferblat is often described as a magic, rebellious and odd space:

A friend of mine said that Ziferblat looks like an underground revolutionary group's headquarters—I think it's a very good description. (Pyotr, Pokrovka's guest, interview, December 2016)

Ziferblat London is a mad, wonderful oddity, there is no road map for what we are doing. (...) It is totally out of the normal boxes, but that's why it's magic. (ZLHG, 2015)

I usually [describe] Ziferblat as a 'place to come to plan a revolution', which is one of my favourite quotes from a guy who'd been here for five minutes. (Evan, Old Street's host, interview, July 2016)

The idea of liminality and otherness is often expressed in metaphors of spatial seclusion where Ziferblat is represented as a separate country¹⁰⁹ (Ziferblat Nevsky, 2014) or 'a microcosm, detached from the outside world' (Francesca, Old Street's host, interview, August 2016). In their descriptions of Ziferblat, visitors and staff also use cultural references to the film *Dead Poets Society* ('It was like that moment when they all sat by the campfire'),¹¹⁰ fantasy and cyberpunk novels ('a cosy hobbit hole like *Bag End*'),¹¹¹ 'a place for Alice and friends to have their never ending tea hours',¹¹² 'a cafe, which is not a cafe, a coffee chain which is not a coffee chain, like in Gibson's *Zero History*'),¹¹³ Russian avant-garde ('it resembles the Russian Formalism art movement') and punk culture ('imagine if Pussy Riot were coffee shop owners'),¹¹⁴ all of which are, in one way or another, heterotopic realms breaking from reality, traditions or establishment.

Ziferblat's liminality reveals itself on many levels, including socio-spatial framing, physical design, ideological principles and temporal structure, all of which will be discussed below.

4.3.1. The Mad Tea Party effect

Ziferblat's socio-spatial hybridity, mixing different frameworks in one place, creates, to extend the above-cited reference to Lewis Carroll, the 'Mad Tea Party' effect: after a

¹⁰⁹ One of Saint Petersburg's Ziferblats, called Ziferburg, pushed their utopian imagination even further and became a literal architectural embodiment of this metaphor. While most Ziferblat branches are trying to be warm and cosy home-like spaces, this one, inspired by Lars von Trier's *Dogville*, was designed as a theatrical imitation of a town. This 300 m² open-plan property, painted in black, was divided into eight zones ('church', 'lighthouse', etc.) separated with white outlines painted on the floor.

¹¹⁰ User's comment in Treehouse's Vkontakte group (Treehouse, n.d.).

¹¹¹ User's comment in Mitin's blog (Mitin, 2013).

¹¹² Reader's comment under the news article about the London's Ziferblat opening (Baker 2014).

¹¹³ Media report on Ziferblat's opening in Manchester (Burns, 2016).

¹¹⁴ This quote and the previous one are from a media report on Ziferblat's opening in London (Hjelmgaard, 2014)

few minutes of confusion about the location and/or access to the building, you enter a space that looks, smells and sounds like a coffeeshop; a staff member at the entrance says: *'Do whatever you like, help yourself to whatever you find in the kitchen, please bring your dishes to the sink before leaving, we will charge you only for your time'*, gives you a stopped alarm clock and writes down your name; you see people around you being engaged in all sorts of activities—working on laptops, chatting, eating, making crafts, taking photos, playing the piano, dancing; someone in the corner is taking a nap; after you find a seat, a complete stranger approaches you with a watermelon and offers you a slice; you try to order a coffee from the person who talked to you at the entrance but she looks at you disapprovingly and says, *'I'm here to help, not to serve. Come with me, I'll show you how to make it.'* In some Ziferblats, this oddity is also represented in their interior design, which adds to the confusion: thus, Pokrovka branch has a coffee table, turned upside down and attached to the ceiling (figure 5), and a wardrobe, used as a doorframe.¹¹⁵



Figure 5. Heterotopic design in Pokrovka
Photo taken by the author, December 2016

Such incongruity makes it difficult for a newcomer to answer the key question one faces when interpreting a social situation: 'What is it that's going on here?' (Goffman, [1974] 1986: 8), which leads to errors in framing, or 'misframings' (Ibid.: 308). Notably, most media reports and visitors' reviews on Ziferblat, as well as other anti-cafes,¹¹⁶ have an algorithmic structure, listing the sequence of actions in this new framework

¹¹⁵ Getting back to the *Dogville* inspired Ziferburg (see note 109), *'There were some secret rules known only to hosts and regulars—you could not step over a "wall", you were supposed to enter and leave a "house" through its "door"'* (Tanya, Pokrovka's host, interview, July 2016).

¹¹⁶ In a Russian documentary made in 2014 to introduce a wider public to the phenomenon of anti-cafes (Moskva24, 2014), a confused 'guest' is assisted by a character who looks and acts like a 'magical helper' from Vladimir Propp's (1968) structuralist theory of fairytales, thereby representing one's first visit to an anti-cafe as a rite of passage to a heterotopia. What is more, a few scenes were filmed at Moscow's version of a globally popular attraction—an 'upside-down house', which is not even an anti-cafe (presumably, it was chosen as the most powerful visual representation of liminality).

(e.g., Soares, 2014; Saad, 2016). As follows from my research, misframings are the everyday reality for all Ziferblat branches and their repercussions range from personal anxiety and awkwardness to open confrontations between staff and customers or even more severe conflicts involving authorities. In chapter 5, I will discuss this issue in more detail, including the origin, manifestations and consequences of such errors and strategies typically used by Ziferblat's staff and customers to overcome them.

4.3.2. From silliness to responsibility: the multifaceted concept of freedom

Ideologically, the concept of loose space is based on the idea of freedom, which has multiple meanings in Ziferblat discourse. On the one hand, it is understood as 'the liberation of human capacities of cognition, affect, volition, creativity, etc., from the normative constraints incumbent upon occupying a sequence of social statuses' (Turner, 1982: 44). As Ziferblat Worldwide's description of Ziferblat suggests, '*People come to third places to be themselves—not a client, a mom or an employee*' (Ziferblat, 2017). '*Freedom of individuality*' and '*freedom of self-fulfillment*' are often claimed to be fundamental values of Ziferblat (Mitin's direct speech in: Reid, 2014; Ekspert, 2012). Furthermore, in many staff and guests interviews, Ziferblat is represented as a space for freethinkers ('*dissidents, people who are able to think more freely*'),¹¹⁷ '*the open-minded, those who see further than others*'),¹¹⁸ rule-breakers and rebels ('*independent people who are not bothered by social norms or expectations, almost misfits*'),¹¹⁹ '*those who believe in personal freedom, breaking the rules*').¹²⁰

Suchlike statements, strikingly frequent in staff and guest interviews and media representations of Ziferblat, are often based on rather limiting assumptions which typically attribute one's open-mindedness—unanimously considered the key prerequisite to being able to fully enjoy and appreciate this place—to their age, occupation, preferred pattern of using the space, or even appearance (see again Mitin's quote about London's '*nice and peculiarly looking people*' as more desirable guests than Muscovites on p. 106). In some interviews, I explicitly challenged such assumptions with my own observations in order to get to the bottom of what prevents one from becoming a 'Ziferblatter':

Ted: I feel like if you explain this concept to the people from older generations, they'll just: 'Why?..' I can't imagine telling my dad about this place... he'll just: 'Why don't you go to a regular cafe?'

A.K.: You know, I've seen a lot of elderly people here...

¹¹⁷ Artem, Pokrovka's guest, interview, December 2016.

¹¹⁸ Nina, Tverskaya's guest, interview, March 2017.

¹¹⁹ Byron, Edge Street's guest, interview, February 2017.

¹²⁰ Evan, Old Street's host, interview, July 2016.

Ted: Oh, really? So, maybe, it's just logical people... not logical... like, scientifically... mathematically...

A.K.: Ah, you mean, more structured?

Ted: Yeah, exactly.

(Interview with an Edge Street's guest, March 2017)

'Logical' people were mentioned as noncustomers in many other interviews even without my interventions. In Moscow and Manchester, participants typically linked this characteristic with one's leisure preferences described as 'structured', 'pragmatic' or 'traditional' (e.g. 'My husband wouldn't get it—for him, going out means eating'¹²¹), which suggests that the idea of open-mindedness in relation to Ziferblat often boils down to the ability to understand and accept the post-functionalist urban culture. This assumption can be illustrated by the following quote: 'That friend of mine... I didn't really get his reaction—he is a kooky, I mean, a truly interesting person, but when I brought him here, he just wouldn't stop whining: "There's no framework, I don't understand what to do here! [emphasis added]"' (Roman, Pokrovka's guest, interview, December 2016).

Open-mindedness is expected not only from guests but also from staff members; this is, for instance, how Gareth, ZUKI's COO, explained what kind of people would not fit their staff requirements:

You have to be absolutely flexible and very open-minded in Ziferblat. And if you have particularly strong beliefs, you probably won't go on with people here. Because we are not extreme, there is nothing extreme about any of us. So, you know, I think, if you're friendly and polite and open-minded and take everything as it comes, then, I think, you'll be fine. (Interview, Edge Street, October 2016)

However, further research on the differences between ZUKI and Ziferblat Worldwide suggests that the former employer expects their staff to be open-minded and not to have strong beliefs simply due to the nature of their job which entails interacting with hundreds of people on a daily basis within a service framework,¹²² whereas the latter wants them to 'stay themselves' and use this selfhood as a placemaking instrument:

Everyone who has ever been to Ziferblat notes this unusual atmosphere of freedom, which comes from our thorough work with the team. It might seem that we simply hire cool dudes, but there is something more. The most important thing for us is to let our workers be themselves, put their best foot forward but not reduce themselves to their formal function. (Self-description by the Ziferblat Worldwide team, see in: Ziferblat, 2017)

¹²¹ Zhenya, Tverskaya's guest, interview, March 2017.

¹²² See, for example, Ben's quote on p. 152.

In Old Street, the internal guidelines explicitly encourage hosts to behave oddly, i.e. *‘to make use of the materials in the space to have fun, and breakdown any idea of how people “should” be in the space’*, which includes *‘riding the scooter to the kitchen, playing with a balloon, getting out the bubbles, sitting on tables, inventing a game, dancing, singing’*, in order to give the guests *‘social permission to be themselves’* (ZLHG, 2015), or, as one of the hosts, Sara, phrased it, *‘to model it for them’* (interview, August 2016).¹²³ The motive of personal freedom, sometimes self-depreciatingly interpreted as oddity, was also quite persistent in the self-identifying statements shared by the members of this team; they call themselves and their peers *‘proud to be weird’*, *‘capable to be silly’*, and *‘trying to find a way to live life not conforming to society’* (Interviews with Francesca, Sara, Kevin, August–September 2016).

Such ‘modelling’, accompanied by some other factors—predominantly spatial layout and design—indeed has a great impact on the guests’ behaviour. In Ziferblat, they can do some things that are not allowed or socially expected in other public places, e.g., unlike in cafes, one can bring and cook their own food or even share it with strangers without raising much suspicion.¹²⁴ In their interviews, echoed by staff’s and my own observations, many guests described Ziferblat as a space where their inhibitions are lowered. As a result, they break from the civil inattention principle (Goffman, 1963; Lofland, 1998), which leads to their increased sociability; as Kevin, Old Street’s host, put it, Ziferblat *‘gives people a licence to speak to other people’* (interview, September 2016). Apart from that, this architecture of freedom has an impact on bodily practices in Ziferblat, as guests move around and interact with the space more freely than in other public places. In more detail, these effects will be discussed in chapters 5 and 7.

Along with the freedom of thought and behaviour, freedom in Ziferblat is also interpreted as the responsibility of communal awareness and the right to participate in placemaking:

We want to educate a little bit, to help people gain personal freedom, which also entails responsibility. (Mitin’s interview in: Gurova, 2014)

¹²³ When announced explicitly, such permission might sound rather pretentious and patronising. For example, when I and my four friends once came to Ziferblat Nevsky in Saint Petersburg, the host started his welcoming speech with the following sentence: *‘It’s a loose space, we want people to feel free here. There is no need to play any roles, to pretend, it’s not an anti-cafe’*, to which my friend immediately replied, *‘Are you trying to say that in anti-cafes people always pretend?’*. The host, clearly confused and embarrassed, stumbled for a while and went on about how he always feels necessary to *‘play roles’* whenever he comes to Moscow (earlier my other friend mentioned that we just arrived from there), which, given the long-standing rivalry between these two Russian cities, might have provoked another unnecessary confrontation. That said, such ‘rites of passage’ into Ziferblat as a realm of freedom are very rare now (the issue of being patronised remains though—see pp. 164 and 166).

¹²⁴ There are some exceptions though; see subsection 7.1.2.

I want to invite people to practice freedom with us. We call Ziferblat a loose space because we are open and ready for people to integrate themselves into this space, to suggest their projects to us, or just play the piano, share their skills, whatever. (...) Paying by time, they become micro-tenants, micro-renters of this space; roughly speaking, here is the space, do whatever you want here. (...) But, unfortunately, not everyone is ready for this, so we have to moderate what is happening here, like, for example, if everyone is sitting and working quietly and someone comes in and starts playing the guitar and shouting like crazy, we will ask them to stop. (Mitin's interview in: Sanduliak, 2013)

In his media comments on Ziferblat's opening in London, Mitin emphasised that the UK guests, unlike Russians, do not need to be 'moderated', as they were raised in a different culture:

In Moscow, those who are over forty are the people born and raised in sovok, whereas here there was nothing like that, so you can see a bloke who rides a bike or a scooter and dresses like a hipster in his sixty or seventy. They are open to everything. (Mitin's interview in: Ilyina, 2013)

*'[In London,] people understand the idea and atmosphere of Ziferblat much faster and deeper than it sometimes happens in Russia,' Mitin says. 'They don't bother each other with loud laughs when it's quiet, and they don't nearly make children in the corner as happens in my country. They understand that they should help themselves with coffee and tea and they wash much more dishes afterwards.'*¹²⁵ (Taylor, 2014)

In London, there are more educated and intelligent people than in Russia, there are no vulgar cafts and liquor stores here. (Mitin's interview in: Turovskiy, 2014)

As follows from these statements (as well as the people-watching scene cited on p. 106), Mitin seemed to have had in mind the image of an ideal Ziferblat's guest—presumably, influenced by the 'Imaginary West' sentiment—which was only partially consistent with his Russian audience but finally materialised once Ziferblat came to the UK. On the other hand, his intention to 'educate' is nothing but an attempt to overcome the aftermath of Soviet social engineering, i.e. to reconstruct the suppressed sense of personal freedom and responsibility. On the other hand, the very assumption that freedom can and should be taught (and, what is more, taught through moderation) goes back precisely to the Constructivist idea of social condensers. In chapter 6, I will address this contradiction in more detail in the context of Ziferblat's cultural policy.

4.3.3. Structure vs. anti-structure: the principle of flexibility

The idea of a loose space implies that Ziferblat does not belong to any specific category and therefore cannot be constrained by any rules or functional limitations:

There are no requirements for people coming here, you don't have to do something, which is different from other places because you always have to

¹²⁵ In my Moscow interviews, Russian hosts said similar things about foreigners visiting Ziferblat.

do something—you always have to buy a coffee, you're always asked what are you doing, so I think it's one of the few places where you're not forced to do anything, you have more than one option what to do. (Kevin, Old Street's host, interview, September 2016)

Nevertheless, even though the phrase *'Here you can do whatever you like'* is used by all branches as one of the core elements of Ziferblat's description, the freedom it promises is by no means absolute. In official communication, this motto is always followed by some variation of the phrase *'as long as you respect other people around you'* (e.g., Kickstarter, 2014); in staff's everyday interactions with newcomers, this message usually takes less direct forms (e.g., hosts' typical comments when showing a newcomer around: *'This is a quiet zone... this one is more lively... Once you're done, could you please bring your dishes to the kitchen.'*).¹²⁶

Apart from that, Ziferblat has some explicit and implicit policies setting limits to this do-whatever-you-want principle. In most branches, such limitations concern alcohol consumption, noise nuisance, profanity, abuse and public display of affection; in some Ziferblats, like Tverskaya, guests are also forbidden from moving a chair or playing a certain song on the piano. As chapters 5 and 6 will demonstrate, Ziferblat spaces, albeit being positioned as loose, are in fact policed and in many ways orchestrated by staff, though the scope and the extent of this control varies across the chain and changes over time. For example, this is how Maya, the branch manager of Tverskaya, which is in many regards one of the most tightly-controlled Ziferblats, answered my question *'How has this place changed since its opening in 2012?'*:

It certainly grew up. A few years ago, we were so childish when making decisions sometimes... I think that radicalism about rules, which at the very beginning put Ziferblat together, has decreased now. If a few years ago a host had told me, 'This guest put his jacket over there, we should probably go and tell him...', I would have said 'Yes, definitely', but now I understand that everyone has their free will... We became wiser, and our standards became more clear—we do have standards now! On the one hand, we might have lost our spontaneity, we became more mature. But, I think, now Ziferblat has become capable of roadmapping. At the beginning, and for quite a long time, Ziferblat existed only for its own sake, like, we broke even, paid the rent or even set some money apart to buy cookies in the next month—well done. Whereas now, we have a plan. It is still far from being precise and neat, but there is a plan. (Interview, July 2016)

In a nutshell, the commercialisation of this project and turning it into a chain made Ziferblat more predictable and routinised and, as Maya put it, less *'radical'*. As it is stated in Ziferblat Worldwide's partnership proposal,

¹²⁶ When asked explicitly if this freedom has any limits, staff would typically say *'The only limit is other people's freedom'* and make jokes like: *'If someone decides to walk around in their undies, it won't be permitted'* (interview with Maya, Tverskaya's branch manager, July 2016) or *'Striptease is a no'* (interview with Alymkulova, Pokrovka, July 2016).

The first Ziferblat emerged in 2011 as the next iteration of Treehouse—a public living room in Moscow city centre where everyone could pay for the entrance as much as they wanted. In Treehouse, people with very different backgrounds would do very different things—drink tea, talk, work and play sonatas. Ziferblat’s framework combines this freedom of a public living room with the financial predictability of a business enterprise. (Ziferblat, 2017)

At the same time, even Edge Street, which, with its streamlined logistics, seems to be the most structured Ziferblat of all four branches researched, in some respects still resists ordering and organisation:

With business side of it, it’s hard to, sort of, predict, whether you’re gonna have a busy day or a quiet day. It’s completely random, there is no real structure, you never know what you are gonna be in for, whether it’s going be busy or quiet, it’s quite a strange pattern to it, so you can’t really tell on that sort of things. (Tracey, Edge Street’s branch manager, interview, November 2016)

When looked through the lens of the theory of liminality, this contradiction comes down to the intricate dialectic between *communitas* and *societas* in Ziferblat. In Turner’s (1969: 96) original interpretation, the former means an anti-structure, i.e. a spontaneous, relatively unstructured and undifferentiated model of society, which gradually but inevitably transforms into a structure, i.e. a more organised, differentiated and hierarchical system, ‘which in its turn produces revolutionary strivings for renewed *communitas*’ (Ibid.: 129). To rephrase De Cauter and Dehaene (p. 111), Ziferblat’s instability is a possibility:

The concept of loose space implies constant changes. If Ziferblat becomes something like this [draws a square box in the air], it will come to an end in half a year. (...) Ziferblat will never turn into McDonald’s where everything is standardised; it will change over time, its aesthetics will change, the music will change, the events will change, and so forth. (Mitin’s public talk in Moscow, see in: Mitin, 2012c)

As can be seen from the above, the principle of flexibility—along with the idea of freedom—is one of the two ideological underpinnings of Ziferblat’s concept of loose space. Judged from my interview with Tanya, Pokrovka’s experienced host and one of the people who helped Mitin to run Treehouse, by at least 2016, Ziferblat has turned from absolute rules to situational ethics:

There are some restrictions but most of them concern those things that can make other people around you uncomfortable, and it varies. For example, the noise ban—in the morning, when many people are working, noise would be disruptive, but at night, especially if it’s the only one group of friends in the venue, they are welcome to have fun and be loud, it won’t disturb anyone. The same goes for board games—for example, Mafia¹²⁷ for a long time was a no because it usually gets loud. But some people can play it quietly. If they don’t, you can say, ‘Sorry, guys, it’s not really

¹²⁷ Russian party game similar to Wink Murder.

welcome here because it disturbs others'. Or, for instance, hugging and kissing—it's a tricky one. Some of us go, 'Oh my god, people are kissing! Unacceptable! Obnoxious! Stop it immediately!'. Sometimes it's ok, but sometimes it feels like you are in their private space, whereas Ziferblat is supposed to be everyone's space. The best option here, though it's still awkward, is to approach them and say, 'It's a small enclosed space, it's uncomfortable for other people around you'. So, I think, you should always consider a particular case. Any rule should be double-checked to ensure that it's adequate to the situation. It doesn't work with alcohol though... Once you allow it to someone, others go, 'Why am I not allowed?'. It's very difficult to explain why, so this is a strict no. (Interview, Pokrovka, July 2016)

However, as Tanya continues, even the alcohol ban sometimes gets temporarily suspended. This heterotopic inversion not only creates a carnival atmosphere (Bakhtin, 1984) but also generates another, successive heterotopia within the already existing heterotopia of Ziferblat:

Sometimes we choose to be less vigilant about it. Recently we threw a party to celebrate the opening of the summer season and we tried some new things—a market, a food court, there was also a gig and a DJ set—quite unusual for Ziferblat. And we decided that, of course, we won't advertise this as a bring-your-own-booze event, we won't provide any alcohol, but we'll be chill about people coming here a bit tipsy or drinking some cider or something like that in the courtyard. They wouldn't disrupt the atmosphere because what we had that day was more like a music festival vibe. And everything turned out just fine—there were so many people but none of them got drunk or lost control or made others uncomfortable. We also do similar things when we celebrate holidays here, say, we treat our guests to champagne on the New Year party, but it's strictly 'from Ziferblat'¹²⁸ (Ibid.)

Nikita¹²⁹ tells me about his recent farewell party in Ziferblat: 'We allowed some alcohol, although we usually don't. And the music¹³⁰ was quite aggressive... well, not really aggressive but quite different from our usual playlist. I bet Indira wouldn't like this [giggles].' (Fieldnotes from Pokrovka, December 2016)

There was an Irish music party once, those guys played harp, they also made Irish nibbles and brought a few bottles of ale and cider. Nobody got drunk of course, but it was such a fun—breaking rules! [giggles] (Roman, Pokrovka's guest, interview, December 2016)

Apart from special events, the alcohol ban is sometimes suspended due to hosts' free will, though, to my knowledge, such occasions are very rare:

When I see someone with alcohol here, I usually say: 'You can have it, but I'm supposed to tell you that it's an alcohol-free place.' But usually I let them, I'm very liberal [laughs]. Sometimes people bring a bottle of wine... but mostly beer. But they don't behave aggressively, no. They don't get drunk, they just have a beer or a couple of glasses of wine. That's it. But

¹²⁸ Meaning that staff members buy some champagne for everyone and this is the only one alcoholic option allowed in the venue during such celebrations.

¹²⁹ A Pokrovka's host.

¹³⁰ There was a solo musician and a band performing at that party; both play low-fi/garage/noise.

that doesn't happen really often. (Francesca, Old Street's host, interview, July 2016)

As I know from informal talks with Moscow staff and guests, such situations are (or at least were) not uncommon in Pokrovka, but, unlike Francesca, Pokrovka's staff would make such exceptions only for themselves and their friends. This and other contradictions between the 'locals' and the 'guests' in this branch will be discussed in more detail in chapter 5.

In his revision of Turner's theory, Faubion (2008: 35-36) suggests that his understanding of the relationship between *communitas* and *societas* is somewhat a bit too binary and structuralist. Indeed, even though from a helicopter view the history of Treehouse and Ziferblat seems to be the history of the eventual ordering of an initially anarchic project, upon a closer look it is clear that at any moment of its history it was simultaneously a structure and an anti-structure, but the balance between these two modalities has been constantly changing. In further chapters, I will look at how the dialectic between anti-structure and structure manifests itself in such everyday aspects of Ziferblat as commensality and soundscape (chapter 5) and social interaction (chapter 6).

4.3.4. Experiments in economy and beyond

Ziferblat, as well as its predecessor Treehouse, has always been framed as a 'social experiment' (see Mitin's interviews and quotes in: Varlamov, 2011; Gurova, 2012; Keeley, 2014). But what exactly has this experiment been trying to test?

First, both projects were meant to provide an alternative to the existing economic system. Treehouse emerged as an attempt to *'liberate people'* from the obligation to consume drinks and food whenever they want to be in a public place (Mitin, 2010b), and, to a certain extent, from the effects of the profit-driven capitalism—as Mitin once noted, *'It pissed me off that in cafes you have to pay 70 rubles for a petty teabag that costs only 2 rubles to produce'* (interview in: Gurova, 2012). A pay-what-you-want principle was introduced as an alternative model seeking to *'demonstrate that projects based on trust can work well'* and *'prove that retail margin is not the only way to do business'* (Mitin's interviews in: Varlamov, 2011; Shackleina, 2012). Even though Ziferblat's financial model was quite different from that of Treehouse, the new idea of paying by time rather than drinks or food was linked to the same intention—to provide an alternative to existing capitalist practices, serve as *'an example of financial honesty towards people'* and *'demonstrate that one can run a business at minimal cost without a crazy profit margin, be it oil production or growing cucumbers'* (Mitin, 2012c). In addition, Ziferblat has experimented with such forms of alternative economy as pop-up

give-away shops and clothing swaps, book-crossing, bike-sharing, recycling and reuse, crowdfunding, potluck meals, suspended minutes,¹³¹ and so on.

Second, Ziferblat is experimenting with the traditional power dynamic in the service sector. Apart from giving customers more control and power through the participative framework of 'micro-tenancy', Ziferblat offered a volunteering scheme where every guest can get free minutes for running some errands (e.g., washing dishes or meeting newcomers); such rewards are also given for donating food, furniture or interior design items. In a similar vein, it was asserted that not only guests but also Ziferblat's staff should be treated '*in a humane way*' (Mitin's interview in: Borzenko, 2011), as '*individuals*' must not be '*reduced to their functions*' and '*pigeonholed into certain roles*' (Ziferblat, 2017) imposed on them by the capitalist economy, which brings us back to the principle of humanity underlined by Marcuse in his reflections on the 'spaces of hope' (Harvey, 2000) operating within the capitalist system but not motivated by profit (see p. 24). Furthermore, in 2015–2016 Mitin launched the 'Teal' management system, also known as 'non-hierarchy', 'holacracy', or 'self-management' (Laloux, 2014) in Pokrovka, Nizhny Novgorod and Dvoryaninovo branches; this model eliminated the hierarchy between hosts and branch managers, turning all team members into 'co-managers' who split tasks and allocate salary on a consensus basis.

Finally, Ziferblat seeks to be a cradle of a new culture of social interaction, which is expected to give rise to some further societal changes in and beyond economy:¹³²

If you're in Ziferblat and you see the way humanity interacts with each other, then maybe you can have the idea to create other structures, whether in technology, finance, food... that encourages the interaction with people. So, I think the big mission is being an example of other ways that society could be, of [the fact that] society doesn't have to be individualistic, cold and separate from each other. Business students always come in here and say, 'How do you make money?'—maybe this could be a good example for them. (Kevin, Old Street's host, interview, September 2016)

However anti-capitalist these aspirations might sound, Ziferblat—unlike the non-profit Treehouse—has always been a business enterprise. This ambiguous position 'within the profit system but not of it' (Marcuse, 2009: 195) resulted in a tangled and uneasy dialectic between the social and the commercial in Ziferblat discourse. First of all, Mitin himself has come through a difficult process of identity transformation that he once

¹³¹ This is a variation of the practice called *caffè sospeso* ('suspended coffee', or 'pending coffee'), originating from Italy, where one customer pays for two coffees but gets only one, 'suspending' the other one to be claimed afterwards by someone who cannot afford to pay.

¹³² See again Mitin's idea of '*changing the nation to make it deserve another government*' (p. 87) and Evan's vision of Ziferblat as '*an attempt to go beyond any previous level of connectiveness and communication in real life*' (p. 101).

called *'the mutation from an artist into a businessman'* (interview in: Nikitina, 2013). Not only had he to reframe his creative ambitions (*'Maybe business is a new form of art... Ziferblat is not for money, it's to improve life on Earth. Who can be as genius as Chekhov, Fellini or Mozart nowadays? I'd better open 100 Ziferblats than write another bad novel'*),¹³³ but he also had to learn how to run a business (*'We almost ruined everything but, thankfully, I was approached by an investor who taught me the basics of entrepreneurship'*).¹³⁴ If at the beginning he kept saying that Ziferblat is not a business and proudly claimed that he never replies to job enquiry emails containing the words like 'staff' or 'vacancy' (Mitin, 2012c), in his latest interviews he seemed very comfortable with saying things like *'scaling up'* and *'diversification'* (WowMoscow, 2016). Furthermore, the whole of Ziferblat's history from its first months until the most recent moments has been a story of numerous tough choices between the social and the commercial. For instance, in the following quote, the decision to raise the price in Moscow Ziferblats was framed in a heterotopic rhetoric of resistance and then surrender to the harsh reality of adulthood:

Dear guests, as you probably know, Ziferblat is a magic realm for those grown-ups who don't want to grow up. But there is big real world outside every treehouse or blanket fort. To preserve our space of playfulness, we sometimes have to yield to the pressure of this outside world. We did our best trying not to change anything in our relationship with you, but the time has come—from now on, the time in Ziferblat will cost 2 rubles¹³⁵ per minute. (Ziferblat, 2014c)

In Old Street, the least profitable branch, some staff interviews were entirely structured as narratives of struggle—to break even, while staying affordable and inclusive (Evan, Sara, July and August 2016). In Edge Street, whose financial situation is much more positive, this rhetoric is used to position Ziferblat as a small independent business struggling against—or, in slightly less radical terms, resisting—large corporate chains (*'Britain needs Ziferblat because chains are murdering our high streets'*).¹³⁶

Notwithstanding the above, while being suppressed by the capitalist system, Ziferblat obtains a great power over those involved in the experiment. While various forms of social experimentation become increasingly popular in many spheres ranging from art to politics, this framework raises some concerns previously discussed in science and technology studies, such as the authority of experts and the distribution of agency in the experiment's design, implementation and interpretation (Lezaun et al., 2016). In

¹³³ Mitin's interview (Vcourse, 2012).

¹³⁴ Mitin's interview (Skibiuk, 2014).

¹³⁵ An equivalent of 3 pence, as of the date of the cited post. The current tariff in both Moscow branches is more expensive (see p. 45).

¹³⁶ Ben, ZUKI's CMO, interview, September 2016.

further chapters, I will address this issue by critically interrogating the execution and results of Ziferblat's social experiment.

4.3.5. Own, stop, turn back: time in Ziferblat

As the previous subsection has shown, bending the rules creates temporary sub-heterotopias within the already existing heterotopia of Ziferblat. Speaking more widely, the tight link between spatial and temporal dimensions of heterotopia, highlighted by Foucault ([1967] 2008: 20), is especially evident in Ziferblat—the place that charges people for time but sells them space. Although most media publications, especially those covering Ziferblat's arrival to the UK, interpreted its financial model as the fact that one '*must pay just to be there*' (e.g., Keeley, 2014), which, unsurprisingly, caused a lot of angry comments from readers ('*How about charging for the air too?*'), Mitin always emphasised that charging guests by the minute is not supposed to be '*another funny way of getting money out of people*'—in fact, it is meant to empower them by letting them own their time and giving them temporary rights to the space so that they can use it however they please (interview in: Reid, 2014). As the analysis demonstrates, though, one's freedom in Ziferblat is limited not only by the freedom of other guests, but also by Mitin's personal idea of what constitutes '*quality activities*' (as opposed to '*killing time*' in non-Ziferblat anti-cafes).

One of the key visual symbols of Ziferblat, always accentuated in media publications and customers' reviews, is a stopped, typically vintage, alarm clock—every guest gets one upon arrival and returns it before leaving; each alarm clock has its own name, which is written down along with the guest's name and time of arrival on a piece of paper (e.g., '*Masha, Sailor, 18.20*') and then attached to the wall next to the reception, so that the host can tell how much time this guest spent in the venue when it is time to pay. Contrary to what one might expect, these alarm clocks are not supposed to be used as timers—presumably, their only function is to symbolise the suspension of the everyday in Ziferblat and mark one's rite of passage into this heterotopic realm, offering a 'time-out from the normative rhythms of urban life and [defying] the imperative of (economic) productivity' (Lambert, 2013: 14). At some point, Old Street and Edge Street stopped using alarm clocks—partly because of their lack of pragmatic function, but mostly because they added to the newcomers' confusion about the space (interviews with Evan, Old Street's host, and Gareth, ZUKI's COO, July and October 2016)—whereas both Moscow teams, despite being very well aware of this effect, still stick to them, which is yet another example of how the proclaimed idea of freedom is often limited by staff's placemaking ambitions.

Another aspect of Ziferblat's heterochronism is the temporal regression, manifesting itself in two related but distinct forms. The first one is the idea of getting back to the historical past, or, more precisely, the fascination with the authentic, be it classic cafes, clubs and salons, pre-digital sociability, or vintage objects. As Linnet points out, drawing on the concept of non-place (Augé, 1995), 'the non-place character of supermodernity disposes people to seek experiences, that run counter to speed and anonymity' (Linnet, 2013: 11). The second one is the desire to get back to childhood and use Ziferblat as an imaginary treehouse where one can hide away from the pressures of adult life. As follows from Mitin's elaborations of this metaphor ('*In a treehouse, it's impossible to play these games of "customer" and "waiter," because every human as an individual cannot be a servant to another*'),¹³⁷ he draws on the classic European understanding of childhood as the time of purity, innocence¹³⁸ and playfulness¹³⁹ (Davis, 2011); translating this into the terms of De Cauter's and Dehaene's (2008) theory of heterotopia, it can be said that childhood symbolises the escape from the economic and the political into the realm of play. However, psychoanalytic geography suggests a more realistic perspective on this metaphor, as children's spaces are largely shaped by the mechanisms of social exclusion, drawing rigid boundaries between insiders and outsiders (Sibley, 1995), which is very typical for Moscow Ziferblats and especially their predecessor, Treehouse (Appendices C, D). Continuing on the role of alarm clocks in Russian Ziferblats, in both Pokrovka and Tverskaya they symbolise one's status as a 'guest' rather than 'regular' or 'local'. Whereas many regulars are allowed to walk in without taking an alarm clock, only with their names written down, locals are typically exempted of both—instead, they put an equivalent amount of money into a donation box. Throughout my ethnography, I heard many stories from and about regulars and locals offended by being asked to take an alarm clock or tell their name to new hosts who did not know about their special status. In chapter 7, I will get back to this issue in the context of the problem of social exclusion in Ziferblat.

In summary, the ways in which Ziferblat suspends the everyday and creates a liminal space include the juxtaposition of different socio-spatial frameworks, heterotopic design, the ideology of freedom and flexibility, and heterochronism.

¹³⁷ Mitin's direct speech in: Galperina, 2014.

¹³⁸ See again his quote on p. 88 where he describes Ziferblat as a 'place that is free from simulacra, false values, toxic relationships, and hypocrisy'.

¹³⁹ Ziferblat Worldwide's official description of Ziferblat refers to Johan Huizinga's book *Homo Ludens* on the role of play in human culture (Ziferblat, 2014a).

Conclusion

This chapter has mapped Ziferblat's heterotopology—an intricate system of spatial metaphors representing the reformatory ethos of this placemaking project and embodied in its physical space and social practices and relations. It has shown that the idea of Ziferblat came from an attempt to create an 'other space' where homeyness meets sociability, classic forms are purified from the dehumanising effects of the capitalist service economy, the cultural gap resulting from the socialist and neoliberal post-socialist ideologies and policies is closed, the limitations of functionalist urban planning are mitigated, consumption is replaced with participation, and, finally, making new social ties is as simple as friending someone on Facebook. Furthermore, Ziferblat was intended to be a safe haven and a liminal space, disrupting the 'time-space rhythms of capitalist development' (Lambert, 2013: 2) and celebrating freedom of individuality, self-fulfillment, thought and behaviour.

However, there are three factors impeding the realisation of this idyll. First, Ziferblat is not single-handedly constructed by the founder alone but rather co-constructed by different actors—local teams, guests, media—each of which might conceive, perceive or live Ziferblat in their own way. Second, each space to which Ziferblat refers to carries specific power dynamics, mode of use and code of conduct; when juxtaposed in one space, these socio-spatial frameworks might contradict each other. Third, the trajectory of seclusion and liminality, represented in such concepts as 'safe haven', 'treehouse' and 'social experiment', inevitably raises the issues of social inclusion and power relations.

Further chapters will deepen the analysis of the contradictions outlined above, approaching them from the angles of multifunctionality (chapter 5), class (chapter 6) and social interaction (chapter 7). They will also elaborate on the complex and inextricable relationship between the spatial and the social in Ziferblat.

Chapter 5. A loose space: in the labyrinth of Ziferblat's multifunctionality

As mentioned earlier, Mitin's idea of Ziferblat as a loose space has two dimensions—ideological ('space of freedom') and functional ('irreducible to one specific function'). While the previous chapter mostly engaged with the former, this one will examine the latter. It will begin with an overview of the key functions performed by Ziferblat, looking at how each function is constructed, interpreted and practised in different branches (section 4.1), and then continue with the analysis of the intricate and not always smooth dynamics arising from juxtaposing multiple functions in one physical space (section 4.2). The concluding section (4.3) will explore Ziferblat's multifunctionality through the lens of food practices, also contributing to the discussion on the issues of power and participation and the social/commercial dialectic in Ziferblat. Ultimately, this chapter aims to provide a critical perspective on the opportunities and challenges of the post-functionalist approach.

5.1. Cemented with a slash: an overview of Ziferblat's functions

As an Evening Standard reporter wittily noted in her article on a pay-by-the-hour coworking space/coffeeshop/bar/nightclub opened in 2016 in Shoreditch,¹⁴⁰ 'Today everything is a something slash something else' (Luckhurst, 2016). Over the course of my research, I have come across a number of ways in which Ziferblat's staff and guests, as well as media commenters, deal with the difficult issue of categorisation. No matter how persistently the Russian team identified Ziferblat as a 'loose space', rejecting the 'cafe', 'anti-cafe', 'time cafe' and 'coworking space' labels, preferred by media and guests, this term did not stick—presumably, because of its vagueness. Their UK colleagues in London and Manchester seemed less negative about the media-imposed term 'pay-per-minute cafe', but never used it for self-identification—instead, they called Ziferblat 'home away from home, pay-per-minute coworking space, public living room' (Old Street) or 'pay-per-minute sitting room, coworking, event space and meeting rooms' (Edge Street). All things considered, I found the 'slash' logic the most analytically productive for thinking and talking about post-functionalist spaces. This section will analyse Ziferblat's key functional frames, identified and cross-checked through media analysis, interviews and ethnography—'pay-per-minute cafe', 'home from home', 'workspace', and 'cultural centre'.

¹⁴⁰ Just across the street from Ziferblat—and clearly inspired by it.

5.1.1. Pay-per-minute cafe

One of the trickiest questions that have arisen over the course of my study was: why, despite all Ziferblat's efforts to reject the 'cafe' label, does it remain so persistent in media representations and guests' perceptions of this space? On the one hand, as section 3.1 has shown, Ziferblat was conceived as quite a radical departure from cafes—not only was it supposed to be more comfortable, sociable and multifunctional, but it also attempted to subvert the servicescape framework by making staff and customers equal 'co-tenants' of the space. On the other hand, no matter how many metaphors Mitin came up with while pondering over his project, none of them was tangible enough to serve as a fundamental spatial form Ziferblat could be built on. To borrow the terminology of conceptual metaphor theory adapted for architecture (Neo, 2010), 'home', 'aristocratic club', 'treehouse', 'social media', etc. were merely source domains, certain elements of which were selected and transferred to the target domain of 'cafe'. All inter-branch differences ignored, a newcomer entering Ziferblat will find a cafe-sized venue dominated by coffee—in terms of scentscape, soundscape (coffee machine whirring) and spatial choreography; other sounds will include cafe-like human buzz and music; the interior will be comprised of tables, armchairs and sofas; people around will be more or less easily identified as staff and customers; finally, even though food options might be scarce, there will be at least a couple of varieties of cakes and biscuits provided by the venue.

Furthermore, as chapters 1 and 3 have demonstrated, none of the innovations introduced by Mitin is entirely new—at different times and in different cultures the cafe has already been used as a social and cultural centre, workspace and home from home, and even consumer participation in cafes is not entirely uncommon. The inherent flexibility, universality and openness of the cafe made this form so semantically and spatially polyvalent that it turned into some kind of umbrella concept for third places. As Laurier (2005: 14) notes, '[c]afes are incredibly diverse in their types, their crowds, their versions of service, their intimacy, ambience, scene and so on, and it is their very variability and mutability that allows them to accommodate others and accommodate themselves in all manner of communities and neighbourhoods'. Thus, many movements hosting social events in various locations including but not limited to cafes (libraries, cultural centres, homes) nevertheless use the 'cafe' label in their names (e.g., Cafe Scientifique, Death Cafe); similarly, 'anti-cafe', 'time cafe' and 'pay-per-minute cafe' proved to be much more comprehensible designations for a new type of public place than an abstract 'loose space'. In a way, the cafe was already loose enough to accommodate many features of Ziferblat.

With all the above in mind, Ziferblat is different from cafes in the following five ways. First, Ziferblat neither has nor ever intended to get a cafe licence—Russian branches are registered as libraries with the right to sell books, crafts, souvenirs, clothes and hold cultural events; the UK branches are licenced as shared workspaces. Second, unlike cafes, whose financial sustainability is highly dependent on foot traffic, all Ziferblats are located on non-ground floors and their identification options are typically limited; of all four branches studied, only Edge Street has its own entrance not shared with any other businesses, hence their retail-style window display. Third, Ziferblat disassociated non food-related cafe activities from food consumption and shifted the balance of functions towards the former, previously considered supplementary rather than central; thus, Ziferblat did away with the cafe social contract obligating customers to order a courtesy drink/meal to obtain the right to the use the space for work-related, social, cultural or home-from-home purposes. Fourth, Ziferblat allows for an arguably unprecedented level of self-service—even though in some fast-food chains customers are expected to tidy up after themselves, no other cafe went as far as to let them make their own drinks and wash their dishes. Fifth, not only does Ziferblat give its customers an opportunity to cook their meals, like some cook-it-yourself restaurants, but it also allows them to bring their own food to the venue, which would make a regular cafe bankrupt very soon. Apart from that, there is one minor but very important—for the UK branches—feature: London and Manchester Ziferblats are still open when most coffeeshops are already closed, which makes these cities more inclusive for those who cannot or does not want to go to pubs, bars or restaurants.

Notwithstanding the above, Ziferblat's departure from cafes, radical in the beginning, was far from being final. Section 5.3 will show how, with the development of this project, it has been in many regards drifting back to the cafe.

5.1.2. Home from home

As mentioned in chapter 4, the universal archetype of home turned out to be the primary point of intersection between the conceived and perceived Ziferblat—of all variety of metaphors coined by Mitin to communicate his vision of Ziferblat, 'home' was the most persistent association shared by staff and guests in all four branches. However, the interpretation of this concept does not entirely correspond with the meaning assigned to it by the founder.

The analysis of interviews and media representations revealed two ways in which staff and guests refer to Ziferblat as a home; speaking very roughly, they can be distinguished as pragmatic and affective. The first approach is focused on such values as material cosiness and greater—than in other public places—freedom of behaviour,

whereas the second one, especially (but not exclusively) common for regulars, locals and staff, was about acceptance and belonging. Although in reality these two aspects of home are often intertwined (e.g., many guests in Russia and the UK associated their instant or long-term emotional attachment to Ziferblat with its vintage-dominated interior—*‘feels like at grandma’s place’*),¹⁴¹ for analytical purposes they will be separated: the first dimension will be discussed below, and the second one will be addressed in chapter 7.

Among the things that make them feel cosy in Ziferblat, most guests mentioned its interior design—worn and natural materials and vintage objects, evoking nostalgia and giving the sense of ‘ontological security’ (Giddens, 1990), and soft armchairs and sofas, allowing for nestling and snuggling.¹⁴² Another recurrent theme concerned Ziferblat’s soundscape, or, more precisely, the fact that it is *‘quieter than most cafes’*, which makes it appealing to those looking for a space for intimate, meaningful conversations with their friends or romantic partners. Other placemaking instruments mentioned in Linnet’s (2013) research on ‘cosy cafes’—coffee scent, retro music and lighting—were not brought up in guests’ interviews, which does not mean that they are not recognised. Maya, the branch manager of Tverskaya, emphasised not only olfactory but also gustatory role of coffee in making one feel settled in Ziferblat:

Coffee is also a part of the atmosphere—when someone comes in here and smells fresh coffee, they feel... maybe not everyone, but most people would feel comfortable. It smells palatable, their receptors start working, they feel good, they want to try it, and it’s very important that our coffee tastes good as well, so that they could sit down, take a sip and go, ‘Right, the coffee’s decent, now let’s look around...’ (Interview, July 2016)

Although Ziferblat’s playlist was not specifically commented on by the guests, other sources suggests that it is thoroughly designed to manage their perceptions of the space and, to a certain extent, orchestrate their activities; as this issue goes beyond constructing the sense of home, it will be addressed in more detail in subsection 5.2.1 and chapter 7. Cosy lighting—‘dim light’, ‘lamps (...) placed at a low height and close to where people sit’ (Linnet, op. cit.: 7)—does make up an important part of ‘homemaking’ in Ziferblat, but, due to the multifunctionality of this space, it is dependent on Ziferblat’s temporal rhythms rather permanent (see 5.2.1).

¹⁴¹ One of those who used this phrase was Marta, a 16-year-old Tverskaya’s guest, who said that she had anorexia and only Ziferblat (as opposed to other public places, including cafes) made her feel comfortable enough to be able to eat there (interview, March 2017).

¹⁴² Apart from that, the Old Street team at some point allocated a space for an ‘imaginary garden’—a green rug with a few cushions and beanbags on it, also resembling a children’s playmat (yet another embodiment of the ‘treehouse for grown-ups’ idea).

Speaking of time, there is one important element of making a public place feel like home overlooked in Linnet's study but highlighted in Hall's ethnography of a London caff—the possibility of taking [one's] time'¹⁴³ (Hall, 2009: 84). In Ziferblat, where lingering is not just allowed but, in fact, capitalised on, such '[time-outs] from the normative rhythms of urban life and (...) the imperative of economic productivity' (Lambert, 2013: 14), along with other placemaking instruments contributing to the sense of home, result in the relaxation of bodily practices and temporal rhythms:

Many people love Ziferblat for these simple things—it's chill here, you can make yourself comfortable on the sofa, stretch out your legs, take off your shoes'¹⁴⁴, lie down with a book... Sounds simple, but you can't do it anywhere else. We've got a regular here, a lady in her forties-fifties, she'd always come here in the evening, watch films with everyone, doze off in the middle, then ask what's the director's name [giggles]. She really likes it here. (Nikita, Pokrovka's host, interview, July 2016)

According to my observations, this kind of behaviour, extending the norms of the social etiquette of public sleeping (Williams, 2007), is indeed not uncommon in all four branches. However, sleep practices often challenge the public character of Ziferblat's space, to which I will get back in subsection 5.2.2.

Apart from snoozing, Ziferblat's guests spend hours engaging in such homely activities as reading, knitting, watching films and TV shows on their tablets and laptops (alone or with a friend/date), making video calls, or just doing nothing but relaxing. Other manifestations of bodily freedom include dancing to the music (typical for staff and locals; less so for newcomers and regulars), stretching, exploring the space, walking around (as an Edge Street guest Susanne noted, '*It feels safe enough to leave your bag and just wander off*'),¹⁴⁵ cuddling and kissing (which is often seen as a threat to Ziferblat's publicness and civility—see Tanya's comment on p. 119 and subsection 5.2.2 for more details). Furthermore, quite contrary to Oldenburg's (1989: 61) assumption that third places are suitable only for social rather than physical regeneration ('one must readily concede that third places are not recommended for the physically ill or exhausted'), Ziferblat is often the first choice for those feeling unwell or tired:

¹⁴³ In the UK branches, the wifi password is literally 'takeyourtime'.

¹⁴⁴ Other Russian anti-cafes go even further in their attempts to create a homely atmosphere—they *make* their guests take off their shoes at the entrance, so that they could walk around in their socks or wear disposable flip-flops provided by the venue. This rule comes from the fact that Russians always take off their shoes when they enter their or someone else's home. Another homely feature offered by many competitors of Ziferblat is house pets—cats, hamsters, degus, cage birds. Stroking a purring cat or listening to canary twitter provides a multi-sensory experience of cosiness; however, as Cowan's historical research on English coffeehouses demonstrates, this is not new (Cowan, 2005: 80).

¹⁴⁵ Interview, March 2017.

Today I chose it because I have a cold, so I wanted some cereal and I wanted to make my own drink. It's just easier here, I don't need to ask, 'Oh please, can I have...' (Iris, Edge Street's guest, interview, February 2017)

Thursday, 10 p.m., just two hours before closing. Rina, a regular, comes in holding shopping bags: 'Gosh, what a day! I'm starving, gonna cook lentil soup... [to everyone] Who wants some?'. (Fieldnotes from Pokrovka, July 2016)

As both examples demonstrate, self-made drinks and meals are powerful instrument for making Ziferblat feel like home, as will be explored further in section 5.3.

A more specific variation of the home metaphor, the phrase 'public living room', coined by Mitin, featured prominently in guests' interviews in Russia and the UK, irrespective of whether or not they were aware of the fact that this formula is used in Ziferblat's official communication. Although Mitin never elaborated on what exactly he meant by the public living room metaphor, the overall context of his statements (e.g., the idea of social media in real life) suggests that it symbolised intermingling, or, speaking in Putnam's (2000) terms, 'bridging' rather than 'bonding', whereas most Ziferblat' guests interpret it in a more traditional way, already known from the research on cafes—as *their own* (rather than everyone's) extended living room (Hall, 2009; Betsworth, 2012). Some guests link this function to the pleasure of 'silent community' (Dokk Holm, 2013): *'It feels like my living room with some people around me'*,¹⁴⁶ others, especially in the UK, refer to the lack of an actual living room in their rented accommodation (*'That guy said he comes here because he has no space but his bedroom'*¹⁴⁷; yet others invite their friends and even relatives to *'visit'*—rather than *'meet with'*—them at Ziferblat.¹⁴⁸ Apart from that, all four branches are often used for birthday and baby shower celebrations. Chapter 7 will discuss the issues of 'public privatism' (Hampton and Gupta, 2008) in the context of social interaction in Ziferblat.

Contrastingly, Mitin's idea of micro-tenancy, also promoted by the UK branches (Burns, 2016; Ziferblat London, n.d.), has never come up in guests' reflections on Ziferblat. The only exception was the interview with Old Street's regulars, ex-flatmates Bryan and Heather. After telling a story that makes a perfect vignette for the idea of Ziferblat as a public living room (both once left their flat independently and, without telling each other, headed to Ziferblat to wrap their Christmas gifts), they linked the idea of home with the sharing economy and participatory culture:

Heather: It's similar to Couchsurfing—all about trust and sharing.

¹⁴⁶ Susanne, Edge Street's regular, interview, March 2017.

¹⁴⁷ Francesca, Old Street's host, interview, August 2016.

¹⁴⁸ Marina, Pokrovka's regular, interview, December 2016.

Bryan: Yes, this paying for time thing is all about giving back and sharing responsibilities. Because you're not paying for a specific thing, like, I wanna coffee, the coffee is this much, and I have the coffee. But here, you just pay for the right to be here, you can do whatever you want, so it feels like everything is being given to you, so I feel more likely to wanna give back, like, by tuning the piano. If it was a piano in Starbucks, I'd be like, well, I paid my coffee... that would be weird. But here, it's like they are giving me this whole space, they've provided a piano for me, so I wanna... If there is a way I can make it better just by doing something myself, then I just will, because...

Heather: I just feel like it's everybody's home, it feels like you have a certain bit of ownership when you stay here. It's like your piano, and you tune it because you wanna play it.

(Interview, Old Street, February 2017)

After that interview, I was approached in private by a host who was on shift at that moment; she told me how she accidentally overheard *'that thing about giving back'* and how this phrase deeply moved her emotionally and nearly made her cry because such insights into the essence of Ziferblat are *'so rare and precious'* (Fieldnotes, February 2017). Section 5.3 and chapter 6, providing a critical look at Ziferblat's DIY and participative ethos through the lens of food, event organising, interior design and soundscape, will explain why, of all four branches, such an insight was most likely to happen in Old Street.

In conclusion, I shall briefly discuss what kind of visitors are especially inclined to use Ziferblat as a home from home (again, in a pragmatic rather than affective sense). Keeping in mind that qualitative methods cannot capture all Ziferblat's demographics and patterns of space usage, it can be concluded that such categories of guests include those whose real homes are temporarily unavailable (people in-between meetings/errands or waiting to catch a train/flight) or fail to provide them with enough comfort or ownership (mothers,¹⁴⁹ teenagers and young adults living with their parents,¹⁵⁰ tenants in rented accommodation). The latter finding supports and expands the arguments of feminist geographers who challenged the traditional, largely idealised vision of home (Rose, 1993; McDowell, 1999).

¹⁴⁹ *'What a great place for exhausted moms! Next time I'm gonna call dibs on that sofa! [laughs] I'll make a cup of tea, grab some cookies, roll myself in that blanket...mmm...'* (Anya, Old Street's guest, interview, February 2017).

¹⁵⁰ *'It feels more comfortable than at home because it's really chill... Nobody bugs you, it's just chill. I come here after classes to calm down and settle my mind before I go home. So many things are happening during the day; it takes time to digest it all. I can't do it at home'* (Nina, Tverskaya's guest, interview, March 2017).

5.1.3. Workspace

Quite contrary to what one might have concluded from Mitin's numerous statements on the social and cultural mission of his project and the overall rhetoric of playfulness and hiding away from the burdens and obligations of adulthood, he has always seen Ziferblat—and, earlier, Treehouse—as a space conducive to work as much as it was intended for leisure. Despite the scarcity of space and resources, Treehouse invested in a printer-scanner-copier, wireless internet and extension leads; in Ziferblat, this architecture of productivity was complemented with flip charts, projectors, and dedicated 'hard' workstations, easily identifiable as such (desk + chair(s) + desk lamp), though even 'soft' zones (armchair(s)/sofa + coffee table + softer lighting) had access to power outlets; later all of this has crystallised into the chain standard. As the opening of Ziferblat in 2011 coincided with the rise of coworking spaces in Russia, Mitin had to clarify the difference between them and Ziferblat, arguing that most of the former lack creative approach (*'boring and miserable'*; *'are yet to become as cool as Google offices'*) and sociability (*'rows of desks'*; *'people sit in front of their computers like in a game club'*)¹⁵¹ and stressing that Ziferblat's functions, despite including work, cannot be narrowed to it (*'We're rather a "coliving" than coworking space'*).¹⁵²

When I interviewed Russian Ziferblat's guests in 2016–2017, Moscow seemed to have many more options for remote workers. As Zhenya, Tverskaya's guest, noted, *'coworking spaces don't look like offices anymore'* (interview, March 2017); many other participants positively referred to Moscow's renovated libraries. In fact, at the end of my fieldwork in all four branches, I got the impression that Muscovites are even better equipped with instant workspaces than Londoners and Mancunians are—if only because of how many anti-cafes they had at their disposal. What makes them opt for Ziferblat then?

Just like 'laptop workers' in Norwegian and English cafes (Henriksen and Tjora, 2018), their Moscow peers choose Ziferblat because its environment, on the one hand, helps them concentrate and stay efficient (echoing the findings of the above-mentioned study, many people specifically emphasised the importance of human buzz and being in the presence of others, especially other remote workers), but, on the other hand, it is more invigorating and relaxed than an office or library. Unlike in coworking spaces (cf. Avdikos and Kalogeresis, 2017), using Ziferblat does not require membership—although all branches offer discounted monthly packages (targeted at but not limited to those using the space for work), anyone can find a temporary workspace there, even if

¹⁵¹ A haunting memory from his teenage years; see pp. 66 and 81.

¹⁵² Mitin's interview in: Gurova, 2012.

they need it only for a few minutes. Hence, Ziferblat is very often used as a space for business meetings—in this regard, it is closer to the publicness of cafes. Another aspect distinguishing Ziferblat from coworking spaces is the greater heterogeneity of its audience, as there are no selection criteria for those willing to join (cf. Potapova, 2013). However, Moscow teams interpret Ziferblat's whimsicality (resulting from its multifunctionality) as a factor that makes it more suitable for creative professionals: *'Even though it's not a coworking space—it might be too loud and hectic at times—illustrators, IT specialists, calligraphers, all sorts of freelancers patronise it'* (Ziferblat, 2017); similarly, some guests said that they would not use Ziferblat for business meetings (*'It's too relaxed and friendly'*),¹⁵³ especially with people coming from a corporate background (*'They wouldn't fit'*).¹⁵⁴ At the same time, Ziferblat's multifunctional character allows for a greater variety of activities and faster switching between them (e.g. making breaks to play the piano for 2-3 minutes after every 30-40 minutes of work—a scene I once observed at Tverskaya). Such flexibility is especially important for people in transit and those with company (contrastingly, most studies on remote workers focus on individual practices):

When my friends from Saint Petersburg are visiting, whenever they need to do some work or some computer stuff, I bring them here, so that I could talk to someone else meanwhile or do something else, so that we don't end up like 'one is working and another one is bored'. (Mila, Tverskaya's guest, interview, March 2017)

Other reasons that make people bring their workspace to Ziferblat, as opposed to other places, include its quirky design (*'I've been looking at other anti-cafes, but those IKEA sofas, IKEA cushions—they have no soul, no life in them... here, everything is inspiring—furniture, music, décor'*)¹⁵⁵ and such individually specific factors as location, cost efficiency¹⁵⁶ and already existing social ties with other guests and/or staff. Remarkably, all the above-mentioned themes were very closely echoed in the interviews with London and Manchester guests.

Furthermore, the case study of four Ziferblats provides an insight into some wider aspects of remote work that have not been adequately addressed in the existing literature. First, literally all participants contrasted their Ziferblat experience to how guilty ('I'm taking up space') and anxious ('Have I overstayed my welcome? Should I order again? How much time do I have?') they feel when they use cafes as workstations; this motif was also ubiquitous in media publications on Ziferblat. Although

¹⁵³ Lida, Tverskaya's guest, interview, March 2017.

¹⁵⁴ Yastrebov, Pokrovka's guest, interview, December 2016.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Depending on one's specific working needs, they might find something cheaper or more expensive but also more suitable than Ziferblat.

this issue was mentioned in some studies on working from cafes (Di Marino and Lapintie, 2017; Henriksen and Tjora, op. cit.), it has not been problematised. Second, contrary to how workspace practices and experiences tend to be universalised in the discourse on ‘digital nomads’, places like Ziferblat—and in this context, that includes cafes—seem to be conducive only to certain kinds of remote work (*‘When I really need to concentrate, I go to the library’*;¹⁵⁷ *‘I find places like that very productive for when I need to make lists or book flights or text someone back, but I don’t do any major work here’*)¹⁵⁸ and appealing only to certain types of workers—in a cognitive rather than occupational sense (e.g., some guests find human buzz helpful, whereas others, wearing earphones, prefer to limit their experience of publicness to the visual scene). On the other hand, my multi-site ethnography supports Henriksen’s and Tjora’s hypothesis (or, rather, a hint enclosed in the title of their article) of the emergence of the ‘cafe worker species’—or, to use Ziferblat’s staff terminology, global coworker¹⁵⁹ species:

Two guys walk in, one says to another: ‘Over there, power outlets’. They sit down, open their laptops, start working silently, not exchanging a single word. How many times have I seen this in the UK Ziferblats? If it wasn’t another language, one could have easily got confused about whether they are in Moscow or in London. (Fieldnotes from Pokrovka, December 2016)

However, this species is more diverse than it is often assumed. As Di Marino and Lapintie (op. cit.: 20) point out, ‘teleworkers’ are not only and not so much artists and writers, as many of them are engaged in business and finance, social services, government and IT—all of which, according to my findings, applies to Ziferblat. In terms of work arrangements, Ziferblat’s ‘coworkers’ are not necessarily those who do not have (or need) an office—some participants turned out to be office workers coming to Ziferblat to do some extra work or for an awayday. Another unrecognised category is students working on their assignments and dissertations—although they are in many regards different from paid workers, their reasons to opt for Ziferblat are very similar (*‘It’s more relaxed than our library’*)¹⁶⁰. Apart from that, there are some local specificities: Pokrovka and Tverskaya are extremely popular for tutorials—private individual lessons of foreign languages, music, drawing and other subjects and disciplines for children and adult learners;¹⁶¹ Old Street is used as a workspace by creative professionals, whereas Edge Street attracts a wider category of workers,

¹⁵⁷ This phrase appeared in many interviews in all four branches.

¹⁵⁸ Byron, Edge Street’s guest, March 2017.

¹⁵⁹ They use this word to designate all kinds of people who use Ziferblat for work, even if they do not collaborate with each other.

¹⁶⁰ Kara, Edge Street’s guest, interview, March 2017.

¹⁶¹ Such one-on-one lessons (not to be confused with public classes offered by Ziferblat) are an important but ‘grey’ part of Russian education system. Typically they take place at tutor’s or student’s home, as no public place is convenient/cost efficient enough to accommodate this practice.

employed or self-employed not only in creative industries but also in finance, retail and social sector. Whereas individual work seems to feature equally in all four branches, business meetings (despite the guests' assumptions cited above) are quite frequent in Tverskaya and even more so in Edge Street; Pokrovka and Old Street are mostly used for more informal collaborative work.

5.1.4. Cultural centre

Cultural production and consumption is one of the key functions of Ziferblat, along with socialising, work, and home-from-home activities. Although the UK branches, unlike Russian ones, do not position themselves as cultural centres, there are some standards shared across the chain. First, all Ziferblats provide free art and craft supplies and give access to musical instruments (each branch has a piano, some also have guitars), which attracts many customers. Throughout the fieldwork, I have seen and talked to many people who come to Ziferblat specifically to do some drawing/sketching, make crafts or play some music. Both amateurs and professional musicians, solo and in duets/groups, use Ziferblat in two modes—performing to the public and practising. Second, all branches hold and host various cultural events (concerts, exhibitions, performances, lectures, workshops, film screenings, poetry nights, etc.) and run classes (foreign languages, various kinds of arts and crafts), where guests can be not only the audience but also participants and organisers.

Ziferblat's cultural function roots back to Treehouse, which, in its turn, was to a large extent inspired by Russian intelligentsia clubs and hybrid bookstores and the overall edutainment movement of the 2000s. Due to Treehouse's non-profit status and DIY ethos, most activities were impromptu, but, at the same time, this place had quite an intensive cultural programme. Spontaneous cultural activities (e.g., playing the piano or other instruments, reading or drawing collectively) were accompanied by specially organised events (film/poetry/board games nights; concerts; language clubs; craft, photography, or acting workshops; invited talks). In Ziferblat, some events are organised by the teams, others are external initiatives; the latter includes public events, available for all guests and advertised in Ziferblat's social media accounts, and private ones, limited to a rented space (one room or the whole venue). Depending on the venue capacity, private externally organised events may include birthdays, baby showers, Christmas and New Year parties, various meetings and workshops, and, in Edge Street's case, even weddings. In chapter 6, I will discuss how different Ziferblats shape their cultural politics, welcoming some activities and events and restricting others.

In summary, Ziferblat's multifunctionality boils down to four functional frames: pay-per-minute cafe, home from home, workspace, and cultural centre. But how do they all coexist in the same place? The next section will look at the clashes, conflicts and misframings stemming from Ziferblat's multifunctional nature.

5.2. Clashes, conflicts, misframings: Ziferblat as a contested space

One important aspect yet missing from the emerging research on the post-functionalist city is the fact that such an approach, mixing different types of usage in the same location, intensifies the inherently contested nature of public spaces (Lofland, 1966; Low, 2000; Webster, 2002). As follows from my ethnography, in Ziferblat multiple user rights mostly clash at the intersection between two functions—work and leisure.

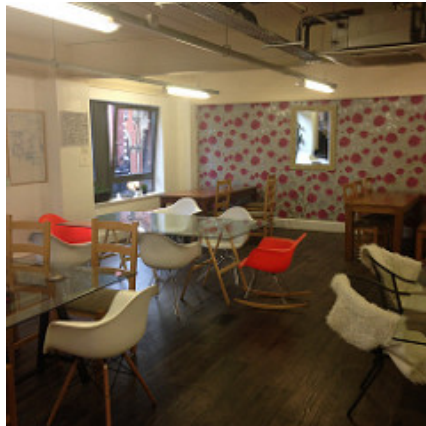
Another area of conflict is the borderline between public and private space—porous by nature, in Ziferblat it is blurred even more by the deliberately constructed sense of home; hence, not only do guests create their bubbles of privacy in Ziferblat, as often happens within the public realm (Lofland, 1998), but they also fall into unintentional errors of interpretation. This section will analyse typical functional clashes and interpretational misframings happening in Ziferblat and the ways in which they are being addressed by the teams.

5.2.1. Balancing work and leisure

As mentioned above, Ziferblat's social contract does not guarantee a library standard of quiet and peace—those trying to use it as a workspace might be disturbed by other guests engaging in recreational, cultural and/or social activities (chatting, playing music, singing, playing board games, moving around, etc.). However, as follows from staff interviews, the needs of those who they call 'coworkers' are equally recognised and respected in all four Ziferblats, even though some branches have more resources to accommodate them than others.

To a large extent, the balance between work and leisure in Ziferblat is naturally maintained by traditional temporal rhythms: mornings and afternoons are typically dominated by work, whereas evenings are structured around cultural and social activities; this logic is also reflected in event scheduling. Nevertheless, throughout my observations I have seen many guests continuing or even starting their work in the evening hours (including such late segments as 9-10 p.m. in the UK and 9-11 p.m. in Russia), no matter how many people around them were doing the opposite. Some guests, especially in the UK, specifically emphasised the importance of having a temporary workspace in the city after the end of what is considered normal working

hours, when libraries and most coffeeshops are already closed, which seems to indicate a demand for not only spatially but also temporally post-functionalist cities.



Figures 6.1 and 6.2. Hard and soft seating in Edge Street
Photos taken by the author, February 2017

Another—and, perhaps, the most powerful—instrument preventing functional clashes is zoning. Apart from offering both ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ types of seating in the main space (figures 6.1 and 6.2), all Ziferblats allocate some more or less secluded and quiet zones specifically for work purposes, although some of such spaces are in fact mixed-used. In Pokrovka, it is the room called ‘library’, furnished with a few tables and chairs (typically occupied by ‘coworkers’), accompanied by two armchairs standing right next to the bookcase (typically used for reading and napping). Usually introduced to newcomers as a ‘quieter’ zone, on some occasions this room hosts cultural events not intended for the main space, as they would disrupt the principle of multifunctionality (e.g., film screenings). Contrastingly, Old Street’s ‘secret hide-away’ room cannot accommodate more than one desk (besides, it has no windows), hence, the only way in which this Ziferblat separates work and leisure activities from each other is soft vs. hard seating in the main space. Old Street’s spatial unity results in the greatest number of functional clashes of all four branches; thus, visitors hoping to use it as a quiet workspace in the evening might end up sharing the room with someone’s baby shower party (a real situation from my fieldwork).

Tverskaya, despite not having any main space at all (but nonetheless offering a variety of hard and soft zones in most rooms), allocated a special room for ‘coworkers’—the ‘lecture room’, which is isolated from the rest of the space in three ways: first, its door is always closed (other Tverskaya’s rooms, unless booked for special purposes, *must* stay open—see paragraph 12 in Appendix G); second, it is soundproof (although of all Ziferblats Tverskaya looks the most spatially divided, sound travels easily through its walls and floors); third, this room has its own tea and snack station, so those sitting there would not need to go out unless they want some coffee or need the toilet. As one

of the regulars once noted, *'This room has tied many coworkers into a community'* (Viktor, interview, March 2017). Just like in Pokrovka, this room is also used for various cultural events requiring quiet—not only for those participating in them (e.g. lectures) but also for people in other rooms (e.g. film screenings). In Edge Street's main space, not divided by any walls, work and leisure zones are quite clearly separated by design—the most distant areas, especially one behind the kitchen, are mostly occupied by 'hard' seating arrangements (including four tables for communal work), whereas the space in the middle is mostly 'soft'. Unlike other branches, Edge Street has a number of privately bookable meeting rooms, unavailable for public use outside of scheduled events, which significantly reduces the number of functional clashes. Besides, Edge Street's piano—as Ben, ZUKI's CMO, ironically called it, *'the biggest source of friction'* (interview, September 2016)—is placed far enough from the work area, whereas other Ziferblats, due to the scarcity of space, cannot reduce its impact on the space.

Apart from seating arrangements and walls, work and leisure activities in Ziferblat are separated by lighting. Depending on the venue size and layout, lighting is used as an instrument of temporal or spatial separation of work and leisure. Thus, Pokrovka, Tverskaya and Old Street teams always dim their main lights (which are already warm enough in all three branches) in the evening, so that those needing more light could choose a place equipped with a desk lamp, whereas Edge Street, using office-style fluorescent lamps with white light for the main space, has different lighting arrangements for its soft and hard zones: the former are dimmed in the evening, but the latter stay bright.

To a large extent, the balance between work and leisure is maintained by the soundscape design. Although the choice of background music varies across the chain (this will be discussed in more detail in chapter 6), all branches adjust the volume according to time of day (quieter in the 'working' hours, slightly louder in the 'leisure' hours); another general rule is turning off the speakers when someone starts playing live music—not only to prevent cacophony but also as a gesture of respect to those expressing themselves. However, if someone happens to play or sing too loudly during the 'working hours', staff members usually intervene, asking them politely to keep it down *'because other people are working'*, though, as my observations suggest, those hosts who come from artistic backgrounds are sometimes less vigilant in this regard (e.g., an Old Street host, who used to work in music management, not only let a group of guests play and sing loudly for quite a long time in the afternoon, but also encouraged them with many comments of admiration and filmed the whole scene for Ziferblat's Facebook page; another host in the same branch, working part-time in theatre, allowed a drama group to disrupt the entire space with a rehearsal, which

started unannounced one and a half hours before the scheduled event, while some guests were trying to work).

Overall, all four branches make great efforts to maintain a fair balance between work and leisure. 'Fair' is perhaps a key word here, as most of such efforts come from an overarching ethical principle, framing Ziferblat's multifunctionality as publicness, or, so to speak, 'everyone'sness'.

5.2.2. The ethics of 'everyone'sness'

Ziferblat's space often gets contested even within the same functional frame. For instance, once I saw how a relatively small room in Tverskaya (two sofas and two tables with eight chairs) brought together two guests editing a radio programme (which involved playing the same fragments again and again on full volume), two other guests having a career advice meeting, and two more guests, working solo on their laptops. Nevertheless, throughout my fieldwork I neither witnessed any open confrontations between Ziferblat's guests, nor did I see them expressing such signs of passive aggression as rolling eyes, raising eyebrows, or clicking tongue. By and large, most of them seemed to have perceived Ziferblat as a public good (Webster, 2002), or, to quote Pokrovka's host Tanya again, as '*everyone's space*' (p. 118), where no consumer has more ownership rights than another. However, Ziferblat's architecture of homeyness often makes its guests perceive and use this space as more private than it was conceived to be. Most such misframings, testing the boundary between the public and private realms, are related to two practices—kissing and sleeping.

Although some hosts or even entire branches (Old Street) are overall more tolerant to kissing couples, all four teams share a common rule: if someone's public display of affection makes people around uncomfortable, staff should intervene; as guests rarely complain to staff about each other's behaviour, hosts are expected to judge whether they should intervene or not from their own feelings about what they see. Sleeping, however, is a more subtle biopolitical issue. Pokrovka and Tverskaya, open until 6 a.m. on weekends, despite allowing their guests to snooze, are trying to avoid being labelled as a 'crash pad':¹⁶² *'It's not really welcome... I mean, we don't say: "Go ahead, get some sleep", but when someone dozes off, we don't bother them, we even cover them with a blanket'* (Nikita, op. cit. interview). Although daytime napping is less stigmatised

¹⁶² This policy roots back to Treehouse, which was often misframed by its visitors as something between a squat and a free hostel. As Mitin emphasised in one media interview, *'It's not a squat, nobody lives here, we don't let anyone stay overnight'* (Varlamov, 2011). However, many non-Ziferblat anti-cafes that operate around the clock not only allow but even encourage their guests (predominantly students) to stay overnight (some venues even have shower facilities).

in staff's eyes, they distinguish between what sociologist Simon Williams (2007) calls 'socially attentive' sleepers, remaining 'within the norms of interactional propriety in public places by sleeping without complete loss of bodily control, deference or demeanour' (p. 319), and 'inconsiderate' ones, ethically and aesthetically challenging Ziferblat's publicness and civility:

If someone just naps in an armchair, it's totally fine. But if someone takes off their shoes, spreads themselves over the space, moves the furniture, lays down, starts snoring—it's quite uncomfortable to everyone. (Tanya, Pokrovka's host, interview, July 2016)

There was a guest who bought a monthly pack,¹⁶³ he'd been coming here every single day for a couple of months and he would sleep all day long. It turned out that he had some housing issues, and we felt so sorry for him at first—poor thing... besides, he bought the pack. But then we realised that he always sleeps in central rooms, exposing his belly and whatnot... And we just said: 'Sorry, dude, you've had enough sleep, you can't do it here anymore' (Maya, Tverskaya's branch manager, July 2016).

Old Street's team, initially very keen on providing a snoozing space to their guests, eventually faced the same dilemma between homeyness and publicness. As the branch manager explained, their 'secret hide-away room' used to be positioned as a napping/meditation room for those exhausted with London's working culture (one of the hosts donated a couch bed for these purposes), but after a while it was decided that,

...it's not a very good practice for us... taking a nap for 15 minutes is okay, but sleeping in Ziferblat... we're not a flat, after all. We are a public place and we should stick to... we are licenced as an office, as a public place, so we can't afford a bedroom. Even in the daytime. (Alex, interview, November 2016)

As a result, this room was reframed into a 'Skype room' and, later, a 'workshop', where one could do some work alone or have a private talk. Nevertheless, the couch, moved to the main space, remained a popular napping site (there was an afternoon when I saw a guest sleeping on her back, having all her body covered with a blanket, which is quite different from the traditional choreography of sleep in public places).

In Edge Street, the issue of public sleeping took yet another interesting turn. Inspired with their marketing director's story about people coming there specifically for power naps (Ben, interview, September 2016) and exhausted after a long week of commuting to Manchester from Warwickshire, I happened to test Edge Street's sleeping etiquette myself:

I'm sitting at a table, trying to keep my eyes open, but cannot help it anymore, so I move to the sofa, sit down and immediately doze off. I wake up in about half an hour and go to the kitchen to make some tea; while the kettle is heating up, I'm having a chat with a host. She says: 'I didn't know

¹⁶³ As mentioned before, such offers are targeted at but not limited to 'coworkers'.

whether I should wake you up or not but Tracey [the manager] explained that you are here for research [meaning that I didn't have to pay]. She said you were probably just tired and told me not to bother you'. It feels a bit weird—did I do something wrong? Later Tracey comes to my sofa to say goodbye as she's done for today; I bring up the nap situation, we both laugh, then I ask how often that happens; she says it's quite common here and then adds: 'There was a guest who dozed off and then, after realising how much time he spent here, he refused to pay'. (Fieldnotes, February 2017)

As this situation demonstrates, Edge Street's tariff sets limitations to the idea of home, or, more specifically, to such an important component of it as 'the possibility of taking [one's] time' (Hall, 2009: 84)—instead of releasing themselves from 'time-space rhythms of capitalist development' (Lambert, 2013: 2), many guests of this branch end up feeling 'on the clock'.¹⁶⁴

Before concluding this discussion of the ambiguous relationship between the public and the private in Ziferblat, I shall mention one more way in which this dialectic manifests itself. Unlike Old Street and Edge Street, offering the option of private booking from the very beginning, Pokrovka and Tverskaya, albeit recognising it as a possible source of profit, refused to rent the space out for private events until about 2016, as that would have made it unavailable to the public, even if for just one evening (eventually, Tverskaya made all of its rooms hireable; Pokrovka rents out only the 'library' but never the main space). The next section will continue the analysis of the clashes between social ethos and commercial logic in Ziferblat in the context of food.

5.3. Sweets and bitters: Ziferblat's multifunctionality through the lens of food

Food practices—provisioning, production and exchange—have long been recognised as a 'cornerstone of culture and social organisation' (Watson and Klein, 2016: 2). Despite Mitin's initial intention to de-emphasise the role of eating and drinking in favour of socialising, work, cultural and home-from-home activities, it was precisely food practices and relations that he placed at the centre of his social experiment, seeking to turn consumers into participants. This section will outline the development of Ziferblat's food practices and explore the ways in which they shape power relations between staff and customers; it will then conclude with the discussion of some food-related legal issues that might impede the development of the post-functionalist framework.

¹⁶⁴ According to Edge Street's team, the average time spent in the venue is 87 minutes. From my limited observations in 2016–2017, it felt like most visits were even shorter than that (my fieldnotes from Edge Street are full of comments on how people constantly come and go and how difficult it is to catch a break in their activities to recruit them for an interview).

5.3.1. Drinking, eating, washing up: mapping Ziferblat's foodways

Ziferblat's foodways, originating from Treehouse, consist of the three underlying elements: brewing/drinking (tea or coffee), cooking/eating, and dishwashing. In what follows, I will discuss how these practices are organised in different branches and how they have been developing over the course of 2010–2017.

5.3.1.1. Treehouse

In Treehouse, each guest could make themselves a cup or a pot of tea, coffee or hot chocolate. At the very beginning, the only drink-making appliance available was a kettle but soon a small (one-group) manual coffee machine got added on. After Alymkulova joined Mitin in running the space (as she recalls in a Treehouse Vkontakte post, *'When I first came here, nobody greeted me, it felt like a snobbish design studio'*), she made sure that every guest was met warmly; quite often newcomers were treated to hot beverages by her and Mitin, acting as the hosts of the house; many guests later reminisced about such moments as especially *'heartwarming'* (Treehouse, n.d.). Those regulars who knew how to operate the coffee machine were keen on teaching others.

Among eatables, Treehouse provided breakfast cereals and sometimes toast, biscuits, jams, spreads, and candies, although, as one of the ex-regulars recalled, *'we did not really have any "purchasing plan"; every time we ran out of something, someone would just grab some money from the donation box and go do the groceries'* (interview, July 2016). In general, guests were expected and encouraged to bring their own food, preferably in shareable quantities, which many of them did, and/or leave a donation comparable to the cost of a cup of coffee or tea in a cafe. They could also use the microwave, the toaster, and the hot plate to cook.

What remains relatively unclear is how dishwashing was organised in Treehouse. According to the house rules posted in its Vkontakte group, guests *'could'* wash up after themselves but it seems that this job was mostly being done by the regulars; some visitors posted angry comments on *'piles of dirty mugs in the sink'*, whereas others reflected on how passionate they were about washing their own and other people's dishes here, despite hating doing it at home (Treehouse, n.d.).

5.3.1.2. Pokrovka

The first Ziferblat differed from Treehouse in two ways. First, it had an open-plan kitchenette and a counter with a more sophisticated three-group coffee machine. Second, the relationships between the owners and the guests were formalised by the pay-per-minute scheme. Formalisation also manifested itself in the appearance of the

paid staff members called helpers, or hosts, whose responsibilities included greeting guests, explaining the house rules to them, showing them around, clocking them in and out, maintaining the space and operating the coffee machine.

In 2014, Mitin decided to remove the counter and turn the coffee machine around, so that everyone could make their coffee themselves, learning from a host or teaching other guests (figure 7); this policy was supposed to do away with the service framework, turn consumption into participation and encourage more social interactions. In their 2016–2017 interviews, Moscow hosts still excitedly discussed this decision as revolutionary and progressive, which ran contrary to my observations, suggesting that in most cases guests ask hosts to make coffee for them rather than make it themselves. As Gleb, Ziferblat Worldwide's CTO, noted, *'It came down a little bit. Maybe we should encourage it more... on the other hand, it is less trouble when we do it for them. But if someone wants to learn, we are always happy to teach'* (interview, Pokrovka, July 2016). Apart from coffee, guests can make their own tea in the kitchenette—this process is more straightforward and therefore does not require any assistance from staff.



Figure 7. 'Social' coffee machine in Pokrovka
Photo taken by the author, July 2016

Over the course of 2013–2016, Pokrovka has been gradually moving towards professionalisation; as Alymkulova reminisced, *'At the beginning, it was like a friend's pad—nothing special [in terms of food and drinks], but really fun. Then we have improved a lot... events, design, coffee and biscuits quality, everything'* (interview, July 2016). At some point, hosts started to wear disposable gloves and use tongs to refill the bowls with biscuits and nuts. Although Mitin and the rest of the team have repeatedly expressed irritation at those referring to Ziferblat as a coffeeshop or a cafe, they attached great importance to the quality of coffee offered in Ziferblat. In his media interviews (e.g., Gurova, 2012), Mitin would typically emphasise that they use only freshly and locally roasted coffee beans and their coffee is just as good as in

coffeeshops, unlike '*cheap stuff*' offered in other anti-cafes (in reality, however, many of them adopted these high standards very soon; some even hired professional baristas). It was agreed that Pokrovka guests can get 'ZiferCoffee' to go for a small fee, which later became standard for the whole Ziferblat chain.

In terms of cooking, Pokrovka's guests can heat their own food in the microwave, although it is placed in such a way that it does not catch a newcomer's eye immediately, which is probably why it is not used very often; the fridge is even more hidden and, given its small size, is almost exclusively used by the staff. Those regulars who feel confident about the space, sometimes use the hot plate to make themselves a meal (one remarkable example from my ethnography was a girl who brought some frozen dumplings, cooked them, put them into a plastic container and left as she was rushing to catch her train).

Dishwashing, initially organised as a self-service practice—guests were encouraged to wash their dishes after themselves; those volunteering to wash larger amounts of dishes were typically rewarded with free minutes—has since undergone a significant transformation. During my ethnography, I still happened to see many guests washing up or at least leaving their dishes in the sink; some enthusiasts would wash what was left by other customers, but whenever they (or I) asked the hosts, '*Should I wash up?*', they typically answered slightly reluctantly: '*Well, if you feel up to it...*'. As one of them explained, '*It just turned out that some people don't wash it properly, so we decided not to push it. If you washed up—good, you might get some free minutes for that. But if you didn't, we are okay with that*' (Nikita, interview, July 2016). Apart from the option of manual dishwashing, Pokrovka has a dishwashing machine, used only by the staff.

As the first anti-cafe in the world, Pokrovka immediately faced the problem of hungry guests who wanted some more substantial and/or healthy food options on top of sweets but were not keen on cooking. The team has made several attempts to improve this situation (e.g., salad tubs provided by a partner cafe and sold in Ziferblat at a cost price in 2012; pop-up cafe where the guests could eat healthy food cooked in Ziferblat by professional chefs and pay by donations in 2017), but those were only temporary solutions. Other anti-cafes tried to address this problem by providing additional options at extra cost (salads, soups, sandwiches, burgers, pizzas, sushi, fresh juice, or even set lunches) or offering delivery discount for orders from partner cafes. The latter model has eventually become a standard—presumably, as the least problematic in terms of licensing and logistics. When a non-Ziferblat anti-cafe owner Oleg Voronov came to Pokrovka in 2016, after a few years since his first visit, he wrote a blog post about how he was surprised by the '*non-stop cooking*' happening there (meaning the

hot plate usage) and stressed that it makes the venue *'feel like a crash pad, which might freak out some customers and therefore reduce the profit'*.¹⁶⁵ Ziferblat team, on their part, has never been at ease with commercialised food consumption in their domain. As Nikita told me, in 2016 they got an offer from a local cafe chain that wanted to sell their sandwiches in Pokrovka branch, which caused many doubts: *'I'm not quite sure if it fits into our culture, we need to discuss it with Ivan. Ziferblat is a space where everything is free, except the time... not even time but... everyone shares the rent, like co-tenants'*¹⁶⁶ (interview, July 2016).

5.3.1.3. Tverskaya

Tverskaya's 'tricky' (as both staff and guests call it) design—two floors, multiple rooms, a very cramped hall and a tiny kitchen, hidden at the backstage—affects local foodways, leaving very little room for participation and DIY experience. A coffee machine is similar to that of Pokrovka but it is operated by the hosts, who stand behind the counter and make drinks on demand, which is visually indistinguishable from a typical coffeehouse layout. Those rare enthusiasts who want to make their coffee themselves are sometimes let behind the counter but only on very rare occasions when it is not too crowded; there are also three self-service tea-making stations at the far side of the hall, in the 'lecture room' and on the mezzanine floor.

The food offer in Tverskaya is exactly the same as it is in Pokrovka—a few varieties of biscuits and nuts. Apart from that, there is a microwave and a hot plate in the kitchen but this room is very unlikely to be found by a newcomer without asking specifically. This is also the reason why dishes in this branch are typically collected and washed by the hosts, though there is an internal—according to my observations, often neglected—rule recommending that if a guest walks in the kitchen, intending to wash their dishes, and bumps into a host who is doing the same, the latter should stop (even if the sink is full) and give the former *'a chance to participate'* (Maya, branch manager, interview, July 2016). Just like in Pokrovka, Tverskaya's fridge and dishwasher are used only by the staff.

5.3.1.4. Old Street

Old Street's kitchen is a relatively small (bigger than Tverskaya) separate room, equipped with a kettle, a microwave, a toaster, a one-group coffee machine, and a fridge (one shelf is marked as *'shared'*, for the food provided by the venue and those guests who want to *'top-up the Zifer-stocks or donate their unwanted snacks'*, and

¹⁶⁵ To protect his anonymity, reference is not included here.

¹⁶⁶ That offer was declined afterwards (I am not aware of the reason why).

another one as *'private'*, for individual snacks and meals one can keep there). As compared to other branches, it looks very shabby (tattered cabinets and appliances, non-matching dishes). Since Old Street does not make much profit and, therefore, their budget is always limited, the amount and quality of food provided is relatively scarce, though in the peak season (between mid-autumn and mid-spring) one would always find here a few varieties of biscuits, toast, spreads, cereals, and some fruit. In the summertime, when the attendance rate drops dramatically, some hosts specifically encourage guests to participate in food supply:

When someone goes: 'Oh, there's no fruit', I just go: 'Well, we actually didn't break even last months, so we can't afford it, but if you ever have any fruit to donate, or if you know anyone who has fruit to donate, or if you can leave something in the donations jar, that'll be amazing'. (Sara, interview, August 2016)

In terms of general attitude, this venue is the least professionalised of all existing Ziferblats, which makes it very similar to Treehouse. One would often find there a roll of toilet tissue used as a kitchen towel; unlike in Moscow branches, staff do not use disposable gloves when setting the snacks and do not seem too perfectionist about the quality of dishwashing.¹⁶⁷ Although many people bring their own food to Old Street, cooking (apart from making toast and salads) is less common in this venue, as it does not have a hot plate. Most guests wash their dishes before leaving but sometimes, especially after big events, it is done by the hosts. When Old Street had just been opened, some media reported on the guests volunteering to wash other guests' mugs (Allen 2014; Campbell 2014), but by the time of my ethnography this enthusiasm seemed to have worn off.

5.3.1.5. Edge Street

Contrastingly, Edge Street's open-plan kitchen is an extremely clean and shiny space, well-equipped with neatly labelled cupboards, easy-to-use automatic coffeemakers with Monin syrups (typically offered in chain coffeeshops); a fridge, stuffed with milk, yoghurt, pop and squash; a few kettles, a microwave, a toastie maker, a mini-oven and a dishwasher; plain white crockery and branded Ziferblat mugs; and a large breakfast bar laden with plenty of sweet and savoury food and even dog treats. According to the ZUKI's COO, this kitchen was intended to be *'ergonomic'* so that *'[it wouldn't] take too long to make a cup of tea'* (Gareth, interview, October 2016). Such a design, along with the massive rate of the customer turnover typical for this branch, makes its kitchen look and feel like a constantly restocked buffet where people swiftly fill their glasses, mugs,

¹⁶⁷ Unlike in the other three branches, Old Street's cups and mugs have long-standing tea and coffee stains, which creates the atmosphere of a carelessly maintained office or shared accommodation kitchen rather than a cafe.

and plates and head to their seats, making way for other customers. Remarkably, many guests do all the above-mentioned while wearing their coats and backpacks, as if they were standing in line at some fast-food restaurant, which is very rare in other Ziferblats.

Like in other branches, Edge Street's guests can bring their own food and/or eat the food provided by the venue; at one point, they could also use a partner discount in Deliveroo. What makes this Ziferblat so different from the other three is not only the amount of food offered here but also the fact that many guests come to Edge Street *only* to eat, using it as a cost-effective breakfast/lunch/afternoon tea place, and leave immediately after finishing their meal. That said, even those who choose to stay longer, engaging in non food-related activities, demonstrated quite a strong consumptive attitude in their interviews, discussing their Ziferblat experience primarily in terms of value for money (e.g., *'It's definitely cheaper than a cafe, you get a lot more'*;¹⁶⁸ *'When I come here, I tend to always think: I need to make it worthy, so I eat as much as I can. Maybe it's expensive... It depends on how much time do you spend'*).¹⁶⁹

Another difference is that dishwashing in Edge Street is framed as a part of the financial agreement between the venue and its customers rather than a participative practice; this condition is articulated by the hosts every time they greet a newcomer and explain the rules to them first presenting them what they have to offer (*'Help yourself to the kitchen goodies... everything is included'*) and then concluding with *'All we ask is to clean up after yourself when you leave. Just put your dishes in the dishwasher or wash them [in the sink]'*. Like in other branches, this rule is often ignored by guests.

In a nutshell, the most striking distinction between this branch and other Ziferblats is that everything in Edge Street revolves around food. When I asked the branch manager how Ziferblat changes throughout the day, her answer was entirely structured around the kitchen maintenance, i.e., restocking it with *'continental breakfast, like croissants and melon and cereals'* until 11 a.m., then *'cakes and fruit, a less breakfasty bar but not quite lunch-time'*, then more savoury lunch options (soups, jacket potatoes, salads, paninis, and quiches), and then finally afternoon tea and cakes (Tracey, interview, November 2016). This food-centred approach manifested itself not only in my observations and staff and guests' interviews, but also in online ethnography. In their social media accounts, Edge Street's team regularly posts photos of the food offered in the venue (e.g., *'We have home made rocky road made by host Mairi! New*

¹⁶⁸ Kyle, interview, February 2017.

¹⁶⁹ Susanne, interview, March 2017.

jam tarts & chocolate chip cupcakes yummy!'); furthermore, despite being very clear (when asked directly in the interviews) about the fact that Ziferblat is not a cafe, they apply for many awards intended for cafes and often win (e.g., Innovation Award in the Cafe Life Awards 2016; Good Food Award 2017).

In summary, the history of Ziferblat, viewed through the lens of its foodways, reads as an initial leap from consumption to participation and a gradual shift back. As the project has been scaling up, the profit-driven logic of financial sustainability required greater quality, a more professional approach, larger venues, and, consequently, faster rhythms, while the room for participation shrank. For instance, even if Tverskaya or Edge Street wanted to engage their guests in participative coffee-making practices, that would immediately disrupt the space with long queues of customers waiting to make their drinks. However, despite all these transformations, Ziferblat still remains an intricate assemblage of different socio-spatial frameworks, which results in quite controversial power dynamics between staff and customers and brings about some serious problems of a legal nature, both of which will be discussed further.

5.3.2. (Dis)empowered by food: the analysis of Ziferblat's food politics

As it has been mentioned in previous sections and chapters, Mitin envisioned Ziferblat as a space where the traditional power dynamic between staff and customers would be deconstructed: the former would no longer be serving the latter, who, in their turn, would get more control over the space; as a result, both sides would be empowered. However, the alternative frameworks that he came up with—or, rather, the power dynamics underlying these frameworks—do not exactly correspond with this ethos. The first of them, 'hosts and guests', albeit promising warmer and more genuine hospitality than one would find in a cafe, assumes that it is Ziferblat's teams who have the privilege to set the house rules, which their guests should follow. The second one, 'micro-tenants', is even more misleading, as in reality Ziferblat's staff act like a more established tenant, subletting the space on a short-term lease, if not the landlord. The following quote is a perfect example of how these two models get mixed up and how the former swallows the latter: *'I always tell [the customers] that, in fact, they are our guests. We—the hosts—treat them to coffee and tea, and they can help us. It's like a lease rather than a business—you rent the space by the minute'* (Boris, Tverskaya's host, interview, July 2016). As follows from my observations and critical analysis of staff interviews, Ziferblat's ambiguous framework creates an unequal power dynamic, making customers in many regards even more vulnerable than they are in a regular cafe setting.

As Jones et al. (2015: 653) point out, chain cafes like McDonald's, Costa or Nando's provide their customers with a level of social confidence they are unlikely to find in more boutique environments of independent cafes. Familiarity with the chain cafes' routine—'how it works and what is on offer' (Ibid.)—makes one feel like a regular even if this is the first visit to a specific venue. What immediately catches the eye of an ethnographer looking at people's first visits to Ziferblat, irrespective of the branch, is a great level of frustration and confusion expressed in their body language, which does not go unnoticed by the staff. In their interviews, they graphically described what I observed and experienced myself: wandering eyes, bodily stupor and situational blindness (many hosts find amusing the fact that customers often cannot find spoons or teabags, while standing right in front of these objects). While Moscow branches do not seem to offer any solutions to this problem, Old Street and Edge Street demonstrate a greater sensitivity towards their guests.¹⁷⁰ In London, hosts always give every newcomer a full tour around the venue, which does not happen in any other Ziferblat. Furthermore, Old Street's kitchen is full of funny handwritten notes and signs, explaining what is where and what to do to make it work (figure 8.1)—as Holton (2017: 8) notes in his study on emotional placemaking in student accommodation, such objects are powerful instruments producing the sense of home and community. Apart from that, one of the hosts shared his personal—simple but efficient—psychological technique: after showing a newcomer around, he always leaves them alone in the kitchen *'to make them feel like they're trusted, that they're not being watched if they're eating, and to encourage them to look around and explore everything'* (Kevin, interview, September 2016). This solution could not have been applied in Edge Street with its spacious open-plan kitchen, observable from all points of the main space—although it has a thoroughly designed navigation, looking much more professional (and, therefore, less homely) than that of Old Street (figure 8.2), it inevitably creates the feeling of being watched (see figure 4.2, p. 48).

Another persistent pattern of newcomer behaviour, typical for all four Ziferblats, can be called 'domestication by cappuccino', although the sense in which I am using this term, borrowed from Sharon Zukin, is very different from its original meaning.¹⁷¹ Unlike regulars, who typically begin their Ziferblat routine with a quick chat with staff or other regulars, then proceed with other activities (working, reading, etc.), and only after a while going to the kitchen to make themselves a drink, most newcomers start with the latter. Although that might be the result of a misframing ('making an order first', like in a

¹⁷⁰ Cf. the situation with alarm clocks, p. 123.

¹⁷¹ By 'domestication by cappuccino' (or, in other sources, 'pacification by cappuccino'), Zukin meant 'an aesthetic upgrading [of an urban space] by the opening of a Starbucks or another new coffee bar' (Zukin, 2010: 4).

cafe), this pattern might also be interpreted as a confidence booster, letting a new visitor ‘domesticate’ the space (cf. Maya’s comment on p. 129) and mask their uncertainty about an unfamiliar social setting by literally giving them something to do with their hands. However, making a drink in Ziferblat is not always easy.



Figures 8.1 and 8.2. Kitchen navigation in Old Street (on the left) and Edge Street (on the right)
Photos taken by the author, February 2017

From the very beginning of Ziferblat, it has been perpetuated that its hosts ‘*are not waiters*’ and they are here ‘*only to help*’, so those guests who need their assistance (first and foremost in making coffee), should ‘*ask for it, not order like in a cafe*’ (Mitin’s interview in: Vazari 2012). As follows from Pokrovka and Tverskaya staff’s interviews, both teams spent years correcting and lecturing their customers in this regard, sometimes in quite a hostile manner, but eventually they have become less purist about it. Nevertheless, they never bring anyone’s coffee to their table when it is ready¹⁷²—instead, guests are expected to wait near the machine or come back in a few minutes to collect their drink. Ironically, this unwillingness to wait tables brings Ziferblat’s staff back to the service framework, as many of them end up shouting: ‘*Latte’s ready!.. Americano’s ready!*’ like in a regular coffeeshop, while others just silently put the drink on the side of the machine (quite often it takes too long before the guest realises that nobody is going to give them a heads-up, so their coffee gets cold). The whole scene looks especially confusing in Tverskaya—because of its cafe-style counter. Furthermore, most hosts from both branches emphasised in their interviews that they do not like guests ‘*with consumer attitude*’, i.e. ‘*those who expect some kind of service*’ (e.g. who criticise the quality of food and drinks or complain about not being informed that their coffee was ready). In Old Street, such conflicts are rare—whereas the main space might be misframed as a coffeeshop, once a newcomer sees how the

¹⁷² Unless this coffee was made for their friends or Ziferblat’s locals (who can also be their friends).

kitchen is structured, it becomes clear that there will be no service. However, some hosts still prefer to assert their role as 'non-waiters':

I'm really assertive about it. When we get to the kitchen, I tend to say on a positive note: 'This is your kitchen, clean up after yourself, help yourself, I'll show you how to make a coffee and then I'll maybe watch you for the next time, but then you can maybe show someone else'. I'll make my own espresso for me, so they can see, so I set up those boundaries. (Sara, interview, August 2016)

Contrastingly, according to ZUKI's management, Edge Street's hosts' job 'is purely customer service' (Ben, interview, September 2016). As the COO elaborated,

Every host that has been trained here, has been trained with my vision as how I want the service to be delivered. Working with some big businesses like Selfridges, incredibly service-orientated, I wanted to make sure that everybody here felt that. We work on the mantra of 'The answer is yes, now what's your question?'. So, as a guest, if you ask us a question, the answer should always be 'yes' and then we will worry about how we will do it for you. So, if you want Tizer as a drink, then I would expect one of my team to go and buy it for you. (Gareth, interview, October 2016)

At the same time, Edge Street with its automatic coffee machines is, paradoxically, more democratic than Moscow branches and Old Street, where guests are, in fact, forced to ask for assistance. As an Old Street newcomer once noticed in my presence, 'Shame on me—I'm actually a barista myself but I can't figure out how to use this machine... I'd better go ask for help' (fieldnotes, February 2017). Furthermore, in all three branches run by Ziferblat Worldwide, hosts, albeit not being professional baristas, are required to have strong coffee-making skills, which constitutes a large part of their workplace training when they get the job. Similarly, Edge Street's hosts, despite not being trained as cooks, bake 'homemade' biscuits, cakes and pastries and prepare lunch meals, which makes their role even closer to cafe staff. Interestingly, in this branch food made by the hosts is framed as a part of the menu (it is placed on the counter among other food and posted on social media in a 'today's special' manner), whereas in Pokrovka and Old Street (less so in Tverskaya), when hosts sometimes cook something or share some ready-to-eat food with the guests, it is always shaped as a gesture of hospitality (thus, hosts would address everyone at once or approach each guest individually, inviting them to join; in guests' interviews, this experience has been described as 'heart-melting').

Apart from that, food, provided by the venue, is used by the teams not only to establish and maintain trust with their guests but also to control their eating behaviour to make sure that they do not abuse this trust. Throughout the media analysis, allegedly 'unlimited' access to food (whereas in reality all Ziferblats, excluding Edge Street, provide only dry desserts and condiments) and the possibility of gorging has been the

most persistent topic in people's first reactions to Ziferblat's concept. However, according to the teams, guests rarely demonstrate such behaviour, although in Edge Street, with its generous food offer, it happens more often. In their interviews, team members shared a lot of amusing stories about the guests *'grabbing the whole cake and eating it like a banana'*, *'eating the whole watermelon alone'*, *'pocketing someone's sushi from the staff-only fridge in the rear kitchen'*,¹⁷³ *'grabbing a pile of biscuits and leaving'*, etc.¹⁷⁴ (interviews with Gareth, Tracey, Henry, October 2016–March 2017). In such cases, some hosts approach the abusers and say to them: *'Please, you have to share'* or *'This is not how it works'*; others just observe—presumably because it is quite difficult to explain why exactly one cannot behave like that in Ziferblat. To prevent food abuse, hosts appeal to the guests' sense of 'communal awareness' (Tjora 2013) by *'putting out less and making it look prettier to make people think "I don't wanna ruin it, I'll just take one"'* (Tracey, interview, November 2016). In Old Street, offering the scarcest amount of food on display, as compared to other branches, hosts not only leave guests alone in the kitchen to make them feel unwatched—sometimes they even have to *'eat the first donut from the pack to encourage guests to eat'* (Sara, interview, September 2016). Nevertheless, Old Street has a similar internal rule that hosts should never put out all the biscuits at once, even if they have just been delivered.¹⁷⁵

Notwithstanding the fact that Ziferblat's foodways often make guests feel frustrated, confused, watched and controlled, their accounts suggest that it does empower them—in the following two respects. First, almost every guest, regardless of the branch, commented on the importance of not being forced to purchase drinks and food every time when they need a temporary shelter from the city buzz, a workstation with free wifi or a cosy cubbyhole for a private talk. This, however, does not mean that they are not interested in eating and drinking at all—instead, they emphasised that Ziferblat's foodways are more flexible than those of cafes, as the former let them consume the food purchased in other venues or make their meal or drink exactly how they want it:

It's more control over what you want. If I go to the Starbucks, I just have to get whatever drinks that they serve, and here I know that I want just a cup

¹⁷³ Unlike in Old Street, Edge Street's guests are not supposed to keep their own food in the public fridge—as Tracey explained, *'it will definitely be taken by someone'*. If someone needs to keep their food in the fridge, staff leads them to the rear kitchen, located in the meeting rooms and used for event purposes.

¹⁷⁴ One host specifically stressed that this *'social experiment looking at how people act when they have free access to food'* might be especially interesting for me to research—although her interpretation of the idea of Ziferblat as a social experiment was quite different from that of Mitin, it highlights the issue of uneven power dynamic, underlying the very idea of social experimentation, already mentioned in subsection 3.3.4.

¹⁷⁵ Similarly, a non-Ziferblat anti-cafe owner Oleg Voronov has repeatedly emphasised the importance of serving biscuits in small bowls rather than keeping them loose in a large one: *'otherwise customers would feel uncomfortable about helping themselves while being watched'* (interview, July 2016).

of tea or sandwich, I can just make it, or some cereal¹⁷⁶... If I go to Ziferblat, whatever I want—they will probably have some version of it, and if they don't, I can bring some in. That's the other thing as well—if I wanted to buy food somewhere but then sit in the Starbucks and eat it and then sit for two hours working, I would feel like that's a dick move. And here you just can do that because it's fine, you're just welcome. (Bryan, Old Street's guest, interview, February 2017)

Even in Edge Street, whose food offer can easily compete with a good coffeeshop, guests demonstrate quite independent patterns of food consumption:

A group of three women sit down on the sofa and start eating the food they brought in a shopping bag—bottled juice, coke, crisps, sandwiches, salads, yoghurts. The only Ziferblat's thing on their table is one cup of coffee. After finishing their meal in silence, they spend about half an hour chatting and knitting, then leave.

Two ladies, accompanied by two dogs, walk in holding takeaway coffee cups (presumably, bought in a coffeeshop nearby). They find a seat, then one of them heads to the kitchen and comes back with dog treats. While drinking coffee, they feed the dogs, throwing them bites, laughing at their jumping and filming them on a smartphone. In about twenty minutes, they leave. (Fieldnotes, February 2017)

Second, quite contrary to how Mitin envisioned Ziferblat as some sort of a social condenser turning customers into participants, the vast majority of guests, despite attaching a great value to the opportunity of making their drinks and meals (and even washing up) themselves, discussed it in terms of fun and pleasure rather than shared responsibility. Pokrovka's and Old Street's guests were very excited about being their own baristas; as one of them summarised, *'There is no other place where I could learn how to make cappuccino foam'¹⁷⁷* (Marina, interview, Pokrovka, December 2016). Here is another remarkable comment from an Edge Street guest recalling her first visit to Ziferblat:

It was such an energising environment... not like when you are in an office space in a corporate building. Here, it was very relaxed. My colleague texted me today, 'Don't forget to make a cheese toastie', because we've been making them... it's a bit silly, but things like that really added to the day. (Harper, interview, March 2017)

As follows from such comments, not only does Ziferblat's self-service system give people a break from the everyday, but it also addresses the issue of disconnection in the contemporary global food system, where customers are largely separated from producers and from the process of food production (Kneafsey et al., 2008; Weiss, 2014; West, 2016), which equally applies to the catering industry. In a way, Ziferblat

¹⁷⁶ See also Iris's comment on cereal on p. 131.

¹⁷⁷ Another Pokrovka's guest, Yastrebov, devoted seven minutes of his interview to the nuances of coffee making he learned in Ziferblat. What is more, he said he did not like drinking coffee at all, but really enjoyed making it.

reconnects consumers with food, giving them access to the other side of servicescape, although, as discussed before, the opportunity for such reconnection is quite limited.

5.3.3. Pre-licked biscuits: on legal issues of multifunctionality

Looking at Ziferblat's food policy (and politics) critically, one might wonder where the borderline is between participatory ethos and consumer labour exploitation, given that 'many people seem to prefer and enjoy prosuming, even in the cases in which they are forced into this position' (Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010: 25). As the above-cited authors note, even such minor forms of customer participation in fast food restaurants as self-service soda fountains and the etiquette of cleaning up after oneself '[serve] to reduce the need to hire paid (albeit poorly paid) personnel to do this work', as 'consumers do these formerly paid tasks for no recompense (and do it not only without complaining, but seemingly find it to be "fun")' (Ibid.: 26). Judged from this angle, the economic model of the anti-cafe is even more controversial, as such businesses 'avoid many problems faced by cafes, while competing with them' (Shakleina, 2012). Whereas cafes and restaurants must adhere to food safety and hygiene regulations, anti-cafes, still offering—even if not selling—food and drinks, operate under the 'caveat emptor' ('let the buyer beware') principle.¹⁷⁸ In Old Street, this policy—or, rather, the assumptions stemming from it—are comically reflected in the 'PRE-LICKED BISCUITS' sign on the kitchen wall.

In fairness, safety and hygiene issues, despite featuring prominently in the internet comments (e.g. '*Customers washing up? How do we know that the cups will be clean?*'),¹⁷⁹ did not seem to concern the actual guests I observed and interviewed in all four branches. Besides, most Ziferblats make great efforts to stay clean and safe (which is precisely what made Moscow teams start wearing gloves and using tongs, as if they were cafe staff, and quietly reassume the responsibility for dishwashing, initially placed on the customers). However, from the legal perspective, Ziferblat's post-functional approach makes it fall into a grey zone, which entails many difficulties not faced by those operating under more traditional frameworks.

Thus, in less than three months after opening, Old Street branch was issued with an eviction notice: the landlord, misguided by the numerous media reports on the 'London's first pay-per-minute cafe' opening, accused Ziferblat in breaching the lease, or, more precisely, operating a cafe under the shared office licence (Campbell and Boyle, 2014). Even though an expert from Hackney Council later examined the space

¹⁷⁸ However, Edge Street was inspected by the Food Standards Agency in 2016 and rated 5 out of 5. There is no information on Old Street in the FSA website.

¹⁷⁹ See the discussion in: Keeley, 2014.

and confirmed that it is not a cafe and no rules have been violated, this dispute took half a year to resolve. Not only did it cost Ziferblat many customers but it also brought about some limitations, mainly concerning noise nuisance (and therefore affecting its role as a cultural centre) and outdoor advertising (Ziferblat's sign was removed from the building). Moreover, as Mitin recalls, until the problem was solved, Ziferblat *'had been imitating a coworking space—we removed the coffee machine, rearranged the interior to make it look more officey—just in case'* (interview in: Pinayev, 2014).¹⁸⁰ As this situation demonstrates, the more functions and frameworks are blended in one physical space, the more conflicting interpretations arise, sometimes posing very real threats to the future of such projects.

Conclusion

This chapter has mapped Ziferblat's multifunctionality, embodied in four key frames—'pay-per-minute cafe', 'home from home', 'workspace', and 'cultural centre'. As follows from the comparative analysis of the data collected in Russia and the UK, Ziferblat has fulfilled the globally shared need for multifunctional spaces, also suggesting solutions to some culturally specific issues on a local level (e.g., precarious position of tutorship in the Russian education system, alcohol-centred evening economy and housing issues in the UK).

This chapter has also addressed the problem currently missing from the emerging research on the post-functionalist city, showing how this in many regards progressive approach to placemaking also creates various clashes, conflicts and misframings. In Ziferblat, most of such collisions happen at the intersection of work and leisure and at the border between the public and private realms. Whereas the work/leisure balance is more or less well-maintained through temporal rhythms, zoning and soundscape design, the public/private dialectic, illustrated with the analysis of Ziferblat's sleeping etiquette, is often subject to arbitrary decisions.

The final section of this chapter, approaching Ziferblat's multifunctionality with the lens of food, has demonstrated that the post-functionalist approach, albeit giving customers more freedom and control over how they use the space, might create quite controversial power dynamics between staff and customers, at times making the latter even less powerful than they are in more conventional public places. Extending the discussion on the issue of social confidence in public places (Jones et al., 2015), I argue that people designing and running multifunctional spaces should be especially

¹⁸⁰ Similarly, ZUKI team calls the food offered in the venue 'refreshments' instead of 'meals' (Ben, interview, Edge Street, October 2016).

sensitive to the possible anxieties and frustrations provoked by such environments. The food lens also shed light on some legal challenges that might affect the development of the post-functionalist city, as the projects combining different functions and frameworks in one physical space might end up in a grey zone in terms of licensing. Finally, the analysis of Ziferblat's foodways and food politics has shown how the profit-driven logic, creeping back to what used to be a non-profit initiative, reduces the opportunity for participation; however, in Russian branches this counter-participatory dynamic also results from the way in which local teams interpret their role as the hosts of the space. The next chapter will further analyse this issue in the context of Ziferblat's cultural politics.

Chapter 6. Whose culture? Whose Ziferblat? The cultural politics of placemaking

In De Cauter and Dehaene's theory, the cultural sphere is envisioned as a sacred space, purified from both the political and the economic; it is exactly that realm where heterotopias emerge and flourish (De Cauter and Dehaene, 2008: 90–91). From a cultural-anthropological perspective, this escape from mundane, down-to-earth, profane and materialistic issues to a more sublime and spiritual domain is an upward journey from 'bottom' to 'top' (Lévi-Strauss, 1955; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980), embodied in the physical architecture of Treehouse and, afterwards, in Ziferblat's metaphor of treehouse.¹⁸¹ However, the principle of verticality—and, therefore, hierarchy—brings about social exclusion on the basis of cultural capital. As Zukin warns, seeing culture as the antidote to the 'Leviathan' and 'Mammon' sides of city life is naive as such an outlook leaves out of account the fact that culture itself is an instrument of power (Zukin, 1995: 1). Not only does this power entail favouring some social groups over others, but it also lets the dominant group dictate their tastes to the others (Bourdieu, [1979] 1984), which begs the question—how does this all correspond with Ziferblat's ethos of non-hierarchy and participation?

To quote Zukin again, one's attempt to critically reflect on the culture(s) of cities should begin with asking the following two questions: whose culture? and whose city? (op. cit.: 47). With this in mind, this chapter aims to provide a critical perspective on the 'whats', 'whys', 'hows', and, most importantly, 'whos' of Ziferblat's cultural politics. In other words, it will explore how Ziferblat constructs its audience and how the audience constructs Ziferblat through culture. In section 5.1, I will discuss Ziferblat's position in the cultures of three cities—Moscow, London and Manchester. Section 5.2. will provide a detailed analysis of the development of Ziferblat's cultural policies regarding interior and soundscape design and event organisation.

¹⁸¹ On a larger scale, this architectural metaphor was realised in Jan Michalski Foundation Writing Residence in Montricher, Switzerland. This full-board accommodation, offered to a small cohort of creative writers selected from across the globe through a highly-competitive process, is composed of eight 'treehouses' (seven of them are residential and one is used as a communal space) suspended underneath a gigantic canopy; altogether, it looks like 'the space-age dream of a Silicon Valley billionaire' (O'Sullivan, 2017). Unlike Ziferblat, JMF provides financial support to the residents of these treehouses rather than charging them for using the space, but the very idea of putting the intellectual crème de la crème together in a secluded and privileged space in order to foster their cultural production work is very similar to Mitin's intentions.

6.1. Ziferblat and the cultures of cities

As shown in chapter 3, Ziferblat was conceived as a heterotopia of compensation for the loss of societal cultural capital in ‘unrefined’ Soviet and ‘savage-capitalist’ post-Soviet times. At the same time, the appearance of this project coincided—and not coincidentally—with the rise of Russian creative class, accompanied by celebratory and often openly elitist rhetoric. One of the most striking differences between Russian and the UK Ziferblats is how strongly the former are preoccupied with their cultural mission—‘*to inculcate consideration, sophistication, humanity in the masses*’ (Mitin’s interview in: Vylegzhanin, 2012) by means of Ziferblat’s interior, music and cultural events—whereas the latter have never expressed such an aspiration, neither overtly nor covertly. As follows from Mitin’s multiple comments on how Londoners are culturally better prepared for his placemaking ideas than Muscovites (see, e.g., his interview in: Baker, 2014), he envisioned Ziferblat as a cultural enclave, or, more specifically, a social condenser producing the creative city within the city of Moscow and, simultaneously, a space that smoothly fits into the already existing creative city of London. Similarly, the ZUKI team sees Ziferblat as a part of the creative city of Manchester (see Ben’s direct quotes in: Willis, 2016), although their interpretation of this concept is quite different from that of Mitin, as will be further discussed below.

6.1.1. Ziferblat in Moscow: an enclave

As it was mentioned in chapters 2 and 3, Moscow staff and guests rarely associate Ziferblat with Soviet public places; Mitin, in turn, was even more explicit in his rejection of this association. However, not only he but also both Moscow teams and many guests (including those born in the late 1990s–early 2000s) perpetuated the Soviet idea of culturedness in their interviews, employing this concept to draw distinctions between the desirables, who belong in Ziferblat, and the undesirables, who are to be either civilised or kept away from this safe haven.

The Soviet notion of culturedness included three elements: civil behaviour, good manners and at least a minimal knowledge of ‘high culture’ (Dunham, 1976: 22; Fitzpatrick, 1999: 80). In the context of Ziferblat, these three criteria can be boiled down to only two—the compliance with the socio-spatial framework (‘What is it that’s going on here?’) and the possession of certain cultural capital. To be allowed to stay in Ziferblat, one should follow the formal rules, i.e. refrain from alcohol consumption and not violate other people’s freedom. To avoid awkward situations in Ziferblat, one should understand how it differs from other public places, especially cafes and, when it comes to Russian Ziferblats, other anti-cafes. That would be enough for those whose visits to

Pokrovka and Tverskaya do not involve seeking new friendships with staff and locals. But to be truly accepted by Ziferblat's crowd in Moscow, one should either belong to the super-creative core of the creative class (Florida, 2005: 34) or demonstrate that their cultural capital is sufficient to join this community.

Both criteria manifest themselves in many explicit and implicit forms. For instance, in staff members' views, people belonging to the super-creative core are by default considered insiders, whereas others, including non-creative (or, so to speak, 'less' creative) professionals and people of working class background, have to prove their eligibility to be able to 'join the club':

There is this thing, which I and many others are trying to combat in ourselves... When nice guys in cool outfits come in and say, 'I work in film industry' or something of that kind, we make this assumption that they are cool and interesting, which they not necessarily are, whereas when we see a person, dressed very plain, who says 'I'm a manager'¹⁸²... but when you start chatting, this person turns out to be much more interesting and cool, and you suddenly have plenty to talk about. I'm grateful to Ziferblat for this experience—it teaches you to not judge the book by its cover. (Tanya, Pokrovka's host, interview, July 2016)

[Answering my question 'How does a newcomer become a part of the community here?'] Well, on the one hand, it depends on to what extent is this person keen on this. On the other hand, it depends on whether this person looks interesting enough. Although it's a bit... so weird to talk about it... not really politically correct, isn't it? At the same time, I think, everyone has the right to choose who they want to interact with. (...) However, there is a perfect example illustrating that any person can fit in: there is a guy from Lyubertsy¹⁸³, he's very cool. He's... he's so from Lyubertsy, like, 100%! [laughs] But he's very amiable and fun, he's very tuned in to what is happening here. He travelled to Eastern Europe with us, we had this car tour last summer... and he turned out to be just awesome. He can be a guy from Lyubertsy when it's needed, but overall he's awesome. (Gleb, Ziferblat Worldwide's CTO, interview, Pokrovka, July 2016)

While Tanya's comment demonstrates awareness and critical reflection on the problem of classism and lookism in Ziferblat, her colleague's response is less consistent. Despite feeling awkward about the lack of 'political correctness' in his words, he honestly admits that one's 'interesting look', presumably indicating their belonging to creative class, is crucial for their initial acceptance by Ziferblat's community. Although he further claims that anyone can fit in, the whole story about the 'guy from Lyubertsy' is framed as something exceptional. Another example is the following extract from the

¹⁸² Unless specified by the context, the word 'manager' in Russian means a lower-level business administrator whose work is considered non-creative (e.g. it is rather an office manager or a retail manager than a PR manager).

¹⁸³ A working-class suburb of Moscow, stigmatised in Russian popular culture as the birthplace of the 1980s 'lyubery' movement, the members of which travelled downtown to physically attack unconventionally dressed young people, and the headquarters of the Lyuberetskaya Bratva, one of the largest and most powerful Russian gangs in the 1980s–1990s.

interview with Artem, the local of both Pokrovka and Tverskaya, whose interest and sensitivity towards the 'Other' nevertheless illustrates the perceived cultural gap between such people and Ziferblat's intelligentsia; note also the assumption that the former should 'change' under the influence of the latter:

It often turns out here that, for instance, my mom—she's a doctor—assisted someone's birth many years ago that or someone's parents worked together... Moscow's centre is like a city within the city [emphasis added]. Not even geographically, but this circle of people... damn, I don't know how to call them... I don't want to say 'intelligentsia'¹⁸⁴... (...) [Later, answering my question 'What kind of people come to Ziferblat?'] People (...) who are able to think more freely than... [long pause] Or those who like being around such people. I know a few guys who go here to catch up with the crowd.¹⁸⁵ These guys aren't really... you can't say that they are... I don't know, it sounds rough, I don't like how it sounds but... You can't say that they think freer than others or that they're artists... but when they end up here, they make new connections and then they come here to catch up with their new friends. And they change a lot... I've known a guy for more than a year, he's coming here only to socialise. There was a day when I noticed that he feels awkward here and I started talking to him, invited him to my place... You know, when I find out that someone is a carpenter or an agronomist, I really enjoy talking to such people, to me it's a completely unknown thing... I always ask them to tell me more about their work. And this guy told me how he installs internet cables at people's homes, how one cable differs from others, and so on... (Interview, Pokrovka, December 2016)

Cultural capital requirements directly and indirectly imposed on the guests in Pokrovka and Tverskaya include certain knowledge, skills, manners, and tastes, most of which come from Mitin's privileged habitus as a person who was born in Moscow, in an intelligentsia family, and engaged in art and cultural industries. In Treehouse, for instance, guests were offered such leisure activities as collectively reading aloud classic fiction books and role-playing them. At first sight, this can be interpreted as one of the many manifestations of the nostalgic back-to-the-roots sentiment of his placemaking projects; in reality, though, this practice was not just nostalgic—not only did it reproduce the 'Russian reading myth', one of the key pillars of the Soviet and post-Soviet idea of culturedness (Lovell, 2000) but it also attempted, whether intentionally or otherwise, to reconstruct the domestic leisure activities typical for Russian pre-revolution upper and middle class and Soviet intelligentsia families. Moreover, the category of Treehouse's 'undesirables' excluded people not only on ethical (freeloaders, drunk and/or aggressive and disruptive visitors) but also on aesthetic grounds (thus, Mitin explicitly stated that people '*looking like they belong to a subculture*', i.e. '*teenage anime fans*', '*stinky hippies and rastafarians*', '*punks*',

¹⁸⁴ In Soviet times, Moscow's centre was primarily inhabited by intelligentsia.

¹⁸⁵ By the word *tusovka* ('the crowd'), he meant Ziferblat's staff and locals.

'skinheads', or 'clubbers' are not welcome in this place),¹⁸⁶ whereas the most unwanted and feared group, *gopniki*,¹⁸⁷ was represented in Treehouse's discourse as both ethically and aesthetically alien. When describing the encounters with drunk and abusive guests, Mitin and other Treehouse's locals often emphasised their ignorance and cultural alienness: '*snored through the Alice in Wonderland readings*', '*barged in at three o'clock in the morning when we were peacefully reading aloud*' (Treehouse, n.d.).

In his early interviews and talks on Ziferblat, Mitin refrained from using the word *gopniki* explicitly but imitated certain speech patterns associated with this stigma, also saying that such people belong in those anti-cafes that allow alcohol (Mitin, 2012c). Although later his rhetoric became less judgemental, he was still drawing the line between 'common people' and 'intelligentsia', claiming that Ziferblat was conceived as a place where they would intermingle (p. 110), but then the former group, whose leisure preferences (i.e. board games) he characterised as 'unsophisticated', was 'stolen' by other anti-cafes:

As a result, Ziferblat became more arty and intellectual, more tailored for those who are keen on personal development and education. I surely like it, as I myself belong to this circle of people who read a lot, studied many things, engaged in creative activities. But the possibility of bringing together different people was erased. We ended up as an arts-and-humanities, not-for-everyone club, though our audience is numerous enough to fill all our venues. (Mitin's interview in: Skibiuk, 2014)

On the one hand, Mitin declared that there is no elitism and clubbiness in Ziferblat ('*I have no snobbery towards those who haven't read Chekhov*')¹⁸⁸ and said that audience rotation is one of the most important factors keeping Ziferblat afloat ('*We always need new people to flow in, otherwise it will turn into a boring clique*')¹⁸⁹. On the other hand, in the very same interviews he used phrases like '*filtering the undesirable audience*'.¹⁹⁰ Apart from the alcohol ban and geographic marginality, discussed in chapter 4, among such filters he mentioned aesthetic sensitivity, i.e. 'apprehension and appreciation' (Bourdieu, [1979] 1984: 30) of the 'signals' sent by Ziferblat's space:

First and foremost, the very framework of Ziferblat works as a filter. Firstly, everything here is saturated with culture and sophistication, and those who are able to appreciate it, prefer Ziferblat to other places. (...) The space sends some signals with its interior, with the people who work there. Therefore, it attracts those who are able to read these signals. (Mitin's interview in: Fahrutdinov, 2015)

¹⁸⁶ Mitin's interview in: Varlamov, 2011.

¹⁸⁷ Russian derogatory term, meaning aggressive young males from lower-class suburban areas.

¹⁸⁸ Mitin's interview in: Fahrutdinov, 2015.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Mitin's interview in: Nikitina, 2014.

This statement was strikingly echoed by Pyotr, a Pokrovka's regular:

I've been speculating on this and here is what I think: in the first place, Ziferblat appeals with its aesthetic and atmosphere. Therefore, I suppose, it wouldn't appeal to a person who is unable to see it, appreciate it, distinguish it from everything else, reflect on it. A person who is too earthbound¹⁹¹ wouldn't like Ziferblat because such person would be unable to immerse themselves in Ziferblat, sense the atmosphere, appreciate this design, appreciate how polite and charming are people here. (Interview, December 2016)

Another filter is Ziferblat's promotion policy, not only targeted to appeal to a very specific audience but also in many regards underpinned by the problematic relationship between social ethos and commercial logic. On the one hand, Mitin has always considered active promotion as something too commercially oriented (Mitin, 2012c), but, most importantly, he has always avoided it as something that might attract undesirables to his carefully nurtured cultural enclave. Thus, he promoted Treehouse only in his own blog and on *Look At Me*—Russian social media targeted at *'hipsters, open-minded people, educated youth who travel around'*¹⁹²—and blamed the decay of this place on the popular media writing about entertainment and leisure in Moscow, as they attracted 'people with consumer attitude' (interview in: Borzenko, 2011). When Ziferblat was opened, Mitin stressed that, unlike other anti-cafes, it will not be advertised on coupon websites (*'not everyone [using them] are people we would like to see in Ziferblat'*), nor did he want Ziferblat to have outdoor advertising (*'we would get all these goths¹⁹³ and alkie hanging out around Pokrovka'*); instead, he opted for the word-of-mouth strategy (Mitin, 2012c; Mitin, 2012d).

When I interviewed the Moscow teams in 2016, their approach did not change much—I constantly heard the same things about 'avoiding the wrong audience' and 'attracting the right people through word-of-mouth', although Indira Alymkulova, who by that time had replaced Mitin in his CEO position, was less prejudiced about the commercial nature of advertising per se (*'We aren't squeamish about buying an online banner or native ads every now and then'*). Her take on the audience targeting was more democratic than that of Mitin but still cautious: *'We aren't prude about buying ads if it brings the audience we like... although, as a CEO, I believe that our guest is any guest, one shouldn't be snobbish, like, "We want intellectuals and adults"'* (interview, July 2016). Tverskaya's team went even further, trying to open themselves to the city (*'There was a city festival, Tverskaya was closed for traffic, so we took this opportunity and put a giant banner on our balcony'*), but then returned to being a hidden enclave

¹⁹¹ Note how he uses the metaphor of verticality in relation to cultural capital.

¹⁹² A self-description from the interview with the LAM founders, Mitin's agemates (Shamakina, 2013).

¹⁹³ In the late 2000s–early 2010s, Chistye Prudy was a popular gathering place for the members of the goth subculture.

(*'Frankly, we freaked out, as many of those who came in were not prepared for Ziferblat'*).¹⁹⁴ Apart from word-of-mouth, both teams turned to social media marketing, to which I will get back in chapter 6.

Overall, what makes Pokrovka and Tverskaya so different from Old Street and Edge Street is how the former two branches— even after Mitin as a CEO was replaced by more democratically spirited Alymkulova—are imbued with cultural elitism, some manifestations of which are easily noticeable, whereas others are more hidden; below I will discuss a few examples.

In 2015, one of the key phrases in the official self-description of Ziferblat (created by the Pokrovka's team but used for the joint positioning of the whole chain) was *'This place brings together graphic artists and book lovers'* (Ziferblat, 2015b); in 2017, the list of the key demographics was extended but still focused on creative professionals (*'Illustrators, IT specialists, calligraphers, all sorts of freelancers'*) and emphasised the 'high culture' bent of the space: *'In the afternoon, composers create their musical pieces here, in the evening, they play it for Ziferblat's public'* (Ziferblat, 2017).

Not only does one's cultural capital have a positive impact on social capital in the Moscow Ziferblats, but it also gives them some financial privileges. In both branches, guests can get a card with a certain number of free minutes if they played a piece of music and their performance gets an especially warm reception from the audience; as some hosts explained to me, it is considered participation in placemaking, just like assistance with housekeeping or other material forms of participation.¹⁹⁵ Such cards are also given to those who can declaim a poem to the hosts, which, given the cultural roots of this practice,¹⁹⁶ creates an unbalanced power dynamic between hosts and guests, putting the latter in the position of being assessed and rewarded, and, therefore, patronised by the former. Speaking of the cards themselves, in Pokrovka the number of free minutes is indicated in Roman numerals (*'CCC'*, *'CXX'*), deciphering of which, again, requires special knowledge (not only myself but also Tverskaya's hosts struggled with it when I once applied my Pokrovka's cards at check-out there).

The piano is also employed as a symbol of cultural supremacy and 'moral excellence' (Bourdieu, [1979] 1984: 6) over those whose cultural capital is insufficient to make them welcome in Moscow Ziferblats. Such people are identified and judged by their

¹⁹⁴ Maya, branch manager, interview, July 2016.

¹⁹⁵ However, as section 6.2 will show, not all kinds of music are equally welcome in Ziferblat.

¹⁹⁶ Making a preschooler declaim a short poem in front of their parents' guests and then rewarding him or her with sweets or toys was a typical practice in Soviet and post-Soviet culture.

enquiries about board games, video game consoles and hookah.¹⁹⁷ In their responses, hosts mention the piano not only and not so much as an alternative to such leisure activities—they rather use it to set the bar high enough to keep the outsiders away:

What most anti-cafes offer is primarily entertainment: XBox, board games. We don't have it, and when people come in here thinking that Ziferblat is an anti-cafe and expecting to find all these anti-cafe things here, it's disappointing. When they ask: 'Have you got an Xbox?', we answer: 'Nope, but you can play the piano', and they go: 'Ugh...' (Tanya, Pokrovka's host, interview, July 2016)

Artem: I like the fact that people have to go through a selection process before they end up in Ziferblat.

A. K.: You mean, Ziferblat is not everybody's cup of tea?

Artem: Well, people are calling and asking if there is a hookah in here. I answered the phone recently, I said, 'No.'—'Then what have you got?'—'Well, we've got a piano.' [laughs] They haven't called back.

(Artem, Pokrovka's regular, interview, December 2016)

Those cultural aliens who nevertheless get through all the above-mentioned filters, become a target for Ziferblat's cultural soft power. The idea and mechanism of such 'civilising' can be best illustrated by the following extract from the interview with Maya, the branch manager of Tverskaya:

We can only hope that those who come here and call us an anti-cafe will at some point understand what a loose space is... Some people wouldn't listen, but others really hang on your words, so you give them a tour,¹⁹⁸ show them everything, tell them about this antique bentwood chair—it's like a museum piece, you can't sit on it... (...) Some say, 'Ew, it's like grandma's apartment, gross!' You know, in other places, there is IKEA everywhere, garish colours, but people like it. So, Ziferblat is bound to reform everyone. Sometimes it works. Say, a lad comes in with his friends, and he's like, 'Waz up, where's the hookah, where's stuff?'—'Good evening, we only have chess.'¹⁹⁹—'Wat? Where's the brewskie, waz goin' on?'—'Look, we have tea, you can brew yourself some tea...'—'Wat? Yo'self???'—'Sure, it's easy. I'll help you, but you can do it yourself. And you can ask for some coffee over here.'—'Huh? Coffee???' And you think, ugh, dudes, go away already, I don't want to deal with you... but then you think, okay, maybe it's worth trying... Sometimes such lads stay, they sit down, try to wrap their heads around it: 'Well, bro, what a freaky place you brought me over to...' Then one of them might come back here and bring his girlfriend, she likes it here, so he's happy, and then this magic change happens—he stops saying 'wat' and gives up his sunflower seeds.²⁰⁰ (Interview, Tverksya, July 2016)

¹⁹⁷ See note 83 on p. 89.

¹⁹⁸ Presumably, that happens very rarely and only in non-peak hours—I have never seen any members of Tverskaya's team giving tours to newcomers.

¹⁹⁹ In this context, chess performs the same symbolic role as the piano in the quotes above.

²⁰⁰ In Russian popular culture a handful of sunflower seeds (used as a snack) is a typical attribute of a gopnik.

The phrase *'Ziferblat is bound to reform everyone'* in this quote is hardly a misspeak. In Moscow Ziferblats, the idea of the supremacy of the cultured and the ambition to civilise and enlighten 'the masses', underpinned by specific historical and cultural reasons, amalgamates with the secret society mentality, driven by and embodied in the metaphor of treehouse. As Rita, a 16-year-old volunteer from Pokrovka, pointed out, *'I noticed that we often talk to newcomers as if they were silly kids'* (interview, December 2016). Together, these two factors result in a judgemental and patronising attitude towards newcomers, unless they immediately demonstrate the super-creative class habitus.

6.1.2. Ziferblat in London: a challenge

According to Mitin, Londoners, unlike Muscovites, did not need to be prepared for Ziferblat—it is rather Ziferblat that had to be tested in the creative, or, rather, super-creative city of London. As he explained in his media interviews, he chose London not only for some personal and organisational reasons (i.e. his long-standing interest in English culture and a relatively short distance between London and Moscow) but also as a challenge, which, if successful, would have paved the way for Ziferblat in the global context: *'We wanted to check whether this concept can fit in the city that is the most progressive in the world in terms of the amount of creative youth'; 'If we conquer London, we can be confident about opening branches in other parts of the world'* (interviews in: Ilyina, 2013; Zakharyeva, 2013).

Upon arrival, he and Alymkulova spent a couple of months on fieldwork research, or, as Mitin put it, *'soaking up London's aesthetic'* (interview in: Nikitina, 2014). Whereas his choice of locations for Treehouse and Ziferblat in Moscow was determined by its concentric-radial form, accumulating all sorts of capital— financial, cultural and social—in its historical and geographic centre, London's cultural geography was much trickier, so Mitin used the help of locals and his LiveJournal followers. In July 2013, he published a post explaining his research strategy (*'We're going to visit all potentially interesting districts and rate them, then we'll start looking for the property'*) and asking his followers to share their thoughts on the criteria they find essential for choosing a place for Ziferblat; he also announced his visit to Shoreditch, describing it as an area *'with hipsters, the oldest gay bar, graffiti, galleries, art shops and things like that'* (Mitin, 2013b). As follows from his reply to one of the commenters asking why he brought up the gay bar—*'Because this fact adds the zest to the atmosphere of this district'*—his vision of London was influenced by Floridian approach to the creative city, promoting the so-called 'gay index' as a quantification of creativity and diversity (Florida, 2005: 40), which was afterwards widely criticised for commodifying homosexuality and

nurturing stereotypes about gay culture (Serpentini, 2013). The following extract from Alymkulova's interview sheds light on why she and Mitin eventually opted for Shoreditch: *'We chose it because it's so progressive. (...) We figured—it's a lively area, it's mostly young people, who are more flexible and open-minded, and overall, it's such a cool district'* (interview, Pokrovka, July 2016).

In my 2016 interviews with Old Street's team, I have heard different opinions on whether Shoreditch's cultural identity fits with the idea of Ziferblat—some hosts were positive about this (*'The vibe down the street—it's us. If we were in a different area or part of London, maybe we wouldn't want foot traffic, but because we're in Shoreditch—yeah, foot traffic, for sure!'*),²⁰¹ others were more critical (*'Shoreditch is known as something very pretentious, something that puts on a show, and doesn't actually mean anything, so we had to define ourselves in contrast to it'*),²⁰² but no one has ever—either explicitly or implicitly—pointed at any category of people that would not be welcome in Ziferblat on the basis of their class belonging or cultural capital. In fact, Old Street's team contested Mitin's choice of location as insufficiently inclusive; furthermore, they not only cooperate with local and adjacent communities²⁰³ but also make efforts to reach those who have already been forced out of Hackney because of gentrification, as will be discussed in more detail in chapter 7.

Overall, Mitin's decision to open Ziferblat in London seems to have paid off—the image of a super-creative city served as a locomotive for Ziferblat's promotion in a global context. Most importantly, it caught the interest of Shenton Group, whose vision of Ziferblat's cultural-geographic identity in the UK context was even more specific.

6.1.3. Ziferblat in Manchester: a collaboration

If Mitin had a number of districts to choose from in London, the Northern Quarter was, as ZUKI's COO Gareth put it, 'a no-brainer' for a Manchester-based team (interview, October 2016). Edge Street's guests were also unanimous—as one of them summarised, *'It fits well into the Northern Quarter; being here completely suits the kind of personality that has. When it popped up, I was not surprised that it was here'* (Harper, interview, March 2017). When talking about this district, many participants, including both staff and guests, compared it to East London or, even more specifically,

²⁰¹ Sara, interview, August 2016.

²⁰² Evan, interview, September 2016. See also his comment on the contrast between Ziferblat and Shoreditch's streets, full of *'drunken, shouting, violent people'* (presumably, on Friday's and Saturday's nights), p. 105.

²⁰³ *'People who live or used to live in Hackney and around—white, black, Asian, Muslim... [pointing directions] there's Bricklane over here, African-Caribbean neighbourhoods over there—they all come to Ziferblat, they bring their culture in here... at our poetry slams, for example'* (Alex, Old Street branch manager, interview, November 2016).

Shoreditch. However, further research revealed one important difference between these two locations that had a strong impact on both Ziferblats. Despite often being labelled as a ‘hipster’ area, the Northern Quarter—largely due to the difference between Manchester’s and London’s geographies—has much more diverse foot traffic than Shoreditch, as it is not so secluded. To quote Gareth, *‘London is diverse as a whole but it’s full of small villages, which aren’t necessarily particularly diverse. (...) Shoreditch is very far east, so there is nothing else around there, other than bars and restaurants, whereas here... Piccadilly, where the train station is, it’s a hive of activity, and we are 10 minutes from there’* (op. cit. interview). Close proximity to Primark shop and Manchester Arndale shopping centre (enclosing a variety of high-street brands, e.g., Boots, Foot Locker, H&M, Poundland, Wilko), and an entertainment hub (The Printworks) is another factor that makes the Northern Quarter more penetrable for ‘non-creative’ demographics.

As mentioned above, in terms of promotion Ziferblat arguably got more benefits from being in London than London did from hosting Ziferblat. In Manchester, it seems to be a mutually beneficial relationship, if not a romance—while local media constantly use Ziferblat as tourist attraction (Shackleton, 2016) and a symbol of ‘Manchester’s creative revolution’ (Rhind-Tutt, 2016), the ZUKI team frames Edge Street as *‘a tribute to the city’s community’* (see Colin Shenton’s direct quote in: Ibid.) and an independent business, contributing to the city’s creative economy (see Ben Davis’s direct speech in: Willis, 2016). As Ben also emphasised,

We need to be aware of this stuff [meaning gentrification in the Northern Quarter—A.K.]. We are trying to be as inclusive as possible. It’s bloody cheap... of course, we get creatives in here, but we also get families, we get people from different socioeconomic backgrounds, we get a variety of people. We are trying to contribute to our environment in which we sit and add to it. (Interview, Edge Street, October 2016)

Getting back to how Mancunians often compare the Northern Quarter to Shoreditch, not only do local media see Ziferblat as an important element of Manchester’s creative industries, but they also use it as an evidence of the fact that Manchester does not lag behind London (Rhind-Tutt, op. cit.), resembling Paul Manning’s (2013) observation of how peripheral and provincial cities see cafe culture as a symbol of urban modernity.²⁰⁴ Nevertheless, the ZUKI team has a very clear idea of which geographic areas are suitable for Ziferblat and which are not. Summarising what Gareth and Ben mentioned in their interviews (October 2016), their choice of locations is purely based on the principle of financial sustainability, which they estimate from a number of social and

²⁰⁴ In my media analysis, this leitmotif was also echoed by all Russian Ziferblats outside Moscow, as well as Slovenian branch (the opening of which was visited by the mayor of Ljubljana) and Ziferblat in Ulaanbaatar.

cultural criteria. Thus, a Ziferblat kind of area is a city centre (*'because our revenue is fifty-fifty meeting rooms and sitting room, and meetings don't happen in the suburbs'*) of a densely populated university town (most likely an old one) with *'pre-established cafe culture'*, *'coworking culture'*, and *'creative culture'* (e.g., Belfast, Birmingham, Bristol, Cork, Dublin, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leeds, Oxford, Sheffield). However, ZUKI's reliance on university towns does not mean that they see students as their primary audience. Even though, according to the team, students account for one-third of all Edge Street's customers, and they are offered a 25% discount in the venue, ZUKI's marketing strategy is carefully thought-out avoid the so-called 'student stigma'.²⁰⁵

We didn't want it to be too studently because that sometimes can put off locals. We obviously welcome students, we want students to come, but we don't want it to be... we did have a lot of feedback initially from the people here, who were like... for example, if you're late 30s –early 40s, and a place is entirely filled with people who look a certain way and are within two-three years of each other, you know, it can make you feel uncomfortable, and this is what we try to do—make sure that it feels inclusive to as many types of people as possible. (Ben, op. cit. interview)

In summary, the above-cited word *'pre-established'* illustrates the difference between Ziferblat's cultural ambitions in London and Manchester versus in Moscow (where the creative city, interpreted as the hegemony of the cultured and the creative, *has to be* established). Contrastingly, in both Old Street and Edge Street, according to staff's interviews, verified to the extent possible by my own observations, teams are equally open to everyone complying with the formal rules of behaviour in Ziferblat, regardless of their class belonging or cultural capital. While pointing out that the vast majority of their audience are creative professionals, London and Manchester teams never mentioned that this social group is in any regard better than others. Instead, they reflected on the ways to make it more accessible to all kinds of guests.

As Bourdieu ([1979] 1984: 6) famously stated, 'Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier'. The next section will provide a closer look at Ziferblat's taste as an important driver of placemaking and one of the factors affecting the power dynamic within the chain (franchiser vs. franchisee; owner vs. branch manager) and on a branch level (staff vs. guests).

²⁰⁵ I borrowed this term from one of Edge Street's guests, Byron, who said: *'It's a negative stigma. I wouldn't come in to a student place. Nothing against students, but they have their own agenda'* (interview, February 2017).

6.2. 'It's always down to taste': Ziferblat as a curated space

In his media interviews Mitin would often describe Ziferblat as his personal oeuvre:

To me, Ziferblat is an art project, a never-ending novel where all branches live their own lives like book characters, and I only need to write it up.

(Mitin's interview in: Sanduliak, 2013)

I came in to that property in Old Street and gasped: oh, how awesome, I want to put this thing here, place that stuff there... I always think like a theatre director, trying to imagine how people will feel the space, how they will move around (Mitin's interview in: Kononov, 2014)

Although these metaphors seem to have helped him to negotiate his identity transformation from an artist to a businessman, they also imply an unequal power dynamic: while he is a 'writer' or a 'theatre director', other people—first and foremost customers but maybe staff members too—are 'book characters' or 'actors'.²⁰⁶ His vision and taste indeed had a great impact on Ziferblat, from interior design to wifi password:

I didn't really plan anything consciously. I just created a place where I myself would feel comfortable, the sort of place I dreamed about. All this furniture, antiques, old photographs, a piano. And the wifi password is 'all you need is love'. (Mitin's interview in: Fahrutdinov, 2015)

As a New York based journalist once wittily noted after browsing through the photos on Ziferblat's Russian website, '*it all looks idealistic, sophisticated, so well laid out and meticulously decorated; it's almost curated*' (Galperina, 2014). Nevertheless, as the chain has been developing, Mitin had to share his power with local teams, some of which were equally, if not more, prone to dictating their cultural policy to the guests, while others turned out to be more democratic. In what follows, I will discuss how at different stages of this placemaking project the proclaimed ideas of non-hierarchy and participation have clashed with the curatorial ambitions of the founder and staff, mostly focused on Ziferblat's interior and soundscape design and event policy.

6.2.1. Banned noodles and rejected Twister: the beginning of curation

In Treehouse, due to its non-profit status and overall DIY spirit, many things were played by ear. At the same time, this place had quite an intensive cultural programme. Spontaneous cultural activities (e.g., playing the piano or other instruments, reading or drawing collectively) were accompanied by those framed as organised events (film, poetry, or board games nights; concerts; language club; craft, photography, or acting

²⁰⁶ Some branch managers also consider their work in Ziferblat the realisation of their creative ambitions. As Natalia Olina, the branch manager of the Saint Petersburg branch, reflects, '*It was like I was given a canvas. I used to think that "creative work" means "drawing" or "composing" but in Ziferblat I realised that you don't need to choose between office work and being an artist – you can realise your creative potential in everyday life*' (interview in: Nagovitsina, 2016).

workshops; invited talks). Even though there was no systematic curation as such, this place was to a large extent shaped by its 'high culture' bent, later inherited by Ziferblat, and the complex of bans restricting guests' activities. It is a fair assumption to say that both elements of Treehouse's cultural policy were dictated by Mitin's personal tastes, either directly or indirectly. Although most aesthetic judgements in Treehouse's online discussions were presented as collective decisions, even a superficial analysis of their conversational dynamics shows that most of them were influenced by Mitin and his coterie, like in the example below:

User 1 (a newcomer): How does everyone look at fantasy board games, e.g., Berserk, Magic?

Mitin: I look reproachfully at them.

User 2 (a local): And I look at them with horror.

Mitin: I look at the comment above with joy.

(Discussion in Treehouse's Vkontakte group, 2011, see in: Treehouse, n.d.)

The fact that, according to other Vkontakte posts, another card game, *preferans*²⁰⁷, was very popular in Treehouse, suggests that the above-mentioned games were rejected as an attribute of an aesthetically inappropriate subculture, just like friendship bracelets²⁰⁸ in the following example:

User (to all): Let's organise a friendship bracelets making workshop.

Mitin: Ouch, let's not.

(Ibid.)

It is unclear why exactly Mitin and his friends were so hostile to subcultures—perhaps they were considered 'vulgar', as opposed to the 'high culture' bent of this place—but this attitude extended even to freedom of speech, as one of the house rules, posted in the Vkontakte group, explicitly banned some popular (as of 2010-2011) slang words originating from anime culture (Russian derivatives of the words *nyan* and *kawaii*) and internet jargon (*holywar*, *mimimi*).

Some activities in Treehouse were restricted not because of their association with subcultures but because they were considered incongruous with the carefully nurtured atmosphere of this place. The discussion on Twister (Appendix E) demonstrates how this game was rejected as not only a noisy (as opposed to Uno, Mahjong, chess, backgammon, and *preferans*, often played in Treehouse) but also a 'silly' activity, and

²⁰⁷ Russian salon card game.

²⁰⁸ In Soviet and post-Soviet times, macramé friendship bracelets were an attribute of hippies; about mid-1990s, they became a fad in a wider, predominantly female, teenage culture; in the 2000s–2010s, they came back as a part of an even wider (not only teenage) handmade and DIY culture. Given that Treehouse hosted many other events of that sort (e.g., henna tattoos and felting workshops), Mitin's reaction seems to have come from his negative attitude towards subcultural aesthetics.

how the participatory initiatives of some guests, not familiar with Treehouse's unspoken code of placemaking, were censored by Mitin, his closest peers, and those conforming to their authority (note also Mitin's high standards of book selection).

Furthermore, Mitin prohibited bringing instant noodles and energy drinks to Treehouse, calling them '*ridiculous and vulgar*' and explaining that their appearance and odour '*kill the atmosphere*' of the venue (see Appendix D). This remarkable example not only illustrates the extent of his placemaking ambitions but also shows how Treehouse's cultural and, consequently, class identity had been constructed through aesthetic judgements. It also demonstrates how the rare attempts to contest Mitin's power over Treehouse were always rebuffed on the basis of his legal rights as the person on the lease ('*your game – your rules*').²⁰⁹

6.2.2. 'Serious place, serious people, serious ambitions'

By the time of the first Ziferblat's opening, Mitin and his team, composed mostly of Treehouse's locals, had gained enough experience and resources for an even more systematic and thorough cultural policy, which included such placemaking elements as interior and soundscape design, control of activities, and events management. Due to the shift from a non-profit initiative to a commercial enterprise, cultural policy, previously used mostly for filtering and 'civilising' the audience, has also become an instrument of Ziferblat's marketing positioning, asserting its primacy and superiority over those who copied this idea.

Taking over a purely DIY and unpolished Treehouse, Ziferblat started off with an affordable IKEA-based design accompanied by a few vintage items.²¹⁰ Over the course of 2011–2014, Pokrovka has been moving towards a more vintage-dominated style, replacing IKEA furniture with antique pieces and distressing the remaining IKEA items to make them look antique.²¹¹ As Mitin said in one of his media interviews, only in London did he and Alymkulova manage to create a completely IKEA-free interior where all furniture was purchased from vintage stores or auctions, which he always wanted but could not carry out because '*there is no heritage culture in Russia*' (Nikitina, 2014). Looked at through the lens of class, this comment gives an additional perspective on the aesthetic sensitivity requirements mentioned in subsection 6.1.1: given the scope of

²⁰⁹ This rule about instant noodles and energy drinks was inherited by Pokrovka (see Mitin's interview in: Ekspert, 2012) and Tverskaya (see paragraph 16 in Appendix D). I am not aware of whether it is still relevant as it was never brought to my attention during my 2016–2017 field trips.

²¹⁰ There were some antiques in Treehouse as well, but mostly accessories rather than furniture (vinyl player, typewriter, etc.).

²¹¹ When I asked Tanya, a Pokrovka's host, if there are any IKEA pieces left in the venue as I could not immediately identify them, she said: '*It's really nice to hear that they don't jump out, because we still have quite a few... for example, this very table we are sitting at*' (interview, July 2016).

the forced population transfer and downward social and economic mobility in the USSR, only very lucky or privileged families were able to pass their possessions down through generations. Therefore, the ability to apprehend and appreciate vintage as a key element of Ziferblat's design distinguishes those Russians²¹² to whom this place looks familiar or attractive from those who are yet to develop their taste for retro style.

This distinction applies not only to Ziferblat's guests but also to its competitors. In his media interviews, Mitin reprimanded his successors for a '*cheap IKEA design*', indicating their '*lack of sophistication*' and '*insensitivity to subtle details*' (Gurova, 2012; Skibiuk, 2014). Ironically, as Maya, the branch manager of Tverskaya, hypothesised in her interview (July 2016), it is very likely that such a style, still dominating in the vast majority of Russian anti-cafes, simply copies the appearance of Pokrovka in late 2011—early 2012, leaving out of account its subsequent transformation.²¹³

The changes were indeed remarkable. The updated, more refined interior of Pokrovka was to a great extent the achievement of Dina Yablonskaya,²¹⁴ who was the branch manager in 2012–2015. In my interviews with the Pokrovka team in 2016, literally everyone gave credit to Dina, mentioning her outstanding knowledge and education and irreproachable taste. Unlike Mitin, who tried a few creative schools but failed to complete his studies, she had a degree in French language and literature and worked at the French radio station in Moscow, also freelancing as an interpreter and translator. Her frequent trips to Europe and extensive connections in Moscow's artistic communities had a great impact on Pokrovka, both in terms of design (many interior elements were brought by her from Dutch flea markets) and events. As Tanya, a host, recalled,

She introduced a new standard of quality... She organised so many high-quality events, for example, those baroque music nights that eventually became our trademark.²¹⁵ Overall, she raised the bar from amateurism to a serious place with serious people²¹⁶ and serious ambitions. (Interview, July 2016)

This focus on professionalisation, strikingly inconsistent with Mitin's declared intention to '*provide people with a space where they could organise their own events*' (interview

²¹² According to Mitin, '*many Londoners—British, American, Indian, Russian, etc.—are more sensitive to the nuances of details of Ziferblat*' (see in: Galperina, 2014).

²¹³ Given the rate of growth of the anti-cafe bubble in 2012–2013, this explanation seems very plausible.

²¹⁴ This is a pseudonym.

²¹⁵ Indeed, these concerts were mentioned by all staff and many guests interviewed in Pokrovka.

²¹⁶ Distinguished Russian and international writers, poets, artists, musicians, film and theatre directors, public intellectuals, journalists, and bloggers, who once performed or gave a talk in Ziferblat, are listed on its Russian website (Ziferblat, 2017). Remarkably, this list does not differentiate between Pokrovka and Tverskaya or even Moscow and Saint Petersburg Ziferblats, merging their contributions into the joined cultural capital of Ziferblat brand.

in: Ilyina, 2013), turned Ziferblat into a much less participatory space, as compared to most Russian anti-cafes. No matter how ‘unsophisticated’ their cultural programme, it is to a large extent self-organised by (or with) the guests—teenagers and young people, whose tastes and interests would be too simple for Ziferblat (e.g., see Tanya’s comment on ‘dumb comedies’ below).

Dina’s influence on Pokrovka seems very similar to what I heard about Olga Frolova,²¹⁷ the co-owner of Tverskaya, who, at the moment of my fieldwork, was completing her PhD research on gender history of Soviet art:

All this beauty is Olga’s personal achievement. She’s an art historian, and it has a great impact on Ziferblat’s appearance to its finest details—how this throw is folded, where that table is placed. (Maya, Tverskaya’s branch manager, interview, July 2016)

Such a professional approach brings about many limitations and restrictions upon guests’ participation. In both Pokrovka and Tverskaya, hosts and managers are very selective regarding the interior accessories and furniture donated by guests:

We are very strict about that. If someone comes in and says: ‘I’ve got a very nice chair, I want to donate it’, then I, instead of immediately saying ‘yes’, reply: ‘Could you please show me the photo first.’ Or they say: ‘I’ve got a great collection of drawings, shall we arrange an exhibition?’—‘Show me your drawings please’, and then I’m looking at these drawings and thinking, ‘Erm...’ And I just say: ‘You know, we’ve got an art historian here, let’s just show it to her and see what she says.’ (Ibid.)

Some hosts fully recognise the fact that their curation runs counter to the declared idea of participation and suggest honesty as a partial solution to this problem, but the necessity of selection stays unquestioned:

Sometimes, even though people are wholeheartedly enthusiastic, you realise that they’ll do more harm than good. [Excitedly] ‘I’ll bring you this great picture I drew! It’s so nice here! I want to donate something nice!’ And you realise—nope, this picture better not be here. It’s tricky—on the one hand, it feels like you’re deceiving people into thinking that they can participate but then you turn them down, but on the other hand, we can’t be a place where anything goes, any assistance, go ahead, hold your movie night with dumb comedies, bring some weird items to decorate the space... So, I prefer to explain politely but honestly—cool, but this picture won’t fit. If you mince words, they’ll understand that their help is rejected but they won’t know why, which is much more frustrating and deceitful, given these high-sounding words about making common cause. (Tanya, Pokrovka’s host, interview, July 2016)

Furthermore, in Tverskaya guests are not allowed to move the furniture around not only because ‘it is an element of the concept, just like coffee and sweets’ but also because most of it ‘requires a special treatment’ due to its age (see paragraph 21 in Appendix

²¹⁷ This is a pseudonym.

G). I once witnessed a situation where a guest, sitting at her table alone, started chatting with two other girls sitting nearby; as the conversation progressed, she moved her chair to their table; in about ten minutes, she was approached by a host who politely explained the rule to her and offered her a folding chair. In the winter time, folding chairs are also offered to those guests whose outdoor clothes did not fit into the wardrobes—as Maya emphasised, *‘because visibility matters... we don’t want it to look like a rail station’* (op. cit. interview). Such a tight control of the space seems to be at least partly fuelled by the location’s historical and cultural identity, which, along with the branch manager’s professional background, makes the local team preserve and curate their Ziferblat as if it was a historic house museum.²¹⁸ Remarkably, many guests use Pokrovka and Tverskaya specifically for their personal photo sessions, which suggests that their interior is often perceived as a Goffmanesque ‘stage’ and a ready-made cultural object rather than a co-constructed space of participation.

Similarly, both branches impose high requirements on the live music played in the venue, including not only ethical (noise nuisance) but also aesthetic criteria. Since the latter are not self-explanatory,²¹⁹ the fact that one’s taste or skills did not meet Ziferblat’s aesthetic standards usually comes as an unpleasant surprise to the person who dared to play or sing there (see the Uma2rman case in Appendix F). According to Maya, in Tverskaya they interrupt people playing ‘low culture’ repertoire, even if they do it as a joke, which often happens to the students of the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory, located nearby (*‘I just say to them: “Hey, what are you doing, stop it! Play your Liszt, go, go!” [laughs]’*). For the same reason, she said, they keep the guitar hidden from the guests, getting it out of the closet only for special musical events where it is being used by professionals, *‘because we know precisely what’s going to happen if one spots it and starts playing all these horrible songs’*. Hosts also intervene if someone is playing or singing off-key or if one’s practising involves errors and repetitions, but this policy is driven by mostly ethical (*‘it disturbs other guests’*) rather than purely aesthetic reasoning.

6.2.3. Constructing the brand standards

When what used to be one independent venue in Moscow started developing into a chain on a national and then international level, Mitin attempted to assert his ownership

²¹⁸ In Russian cities, such museums, displaying the everyday life of writers, artists and other famous people of the past, are typically located in flats rather than houses, which makes this spatial metaphor even more literal. There are fifteen museums of that type, located within walking distance from Tverskaya’s branch (one of them is in the same building).

²¹⁹ Even though Tverskaya’s rules explicitly say *‘we would like to ask you to surprise us with the quality of your skills and repertoire rather than recently learned pop hits’* (see paragraph 10 in Appendix G), there is no guarantee that one will notice and read them before approaching the instrument.

of the concept and set it in stone by making each franchisee sign the royalty agreement which included various standards ranging from coffee to music. Due to the commercial sensitivity of this information, I was only able to partially reconstruct it from the media analysis, staff interviews, and my own observations.

Thus, I am not aware of the ways in which physical design was prescribed in these guidelines, but even a cursory comparative glance suggests that there is at least one thing shared across the chain: all Ziferblats try to look homely and authentic. However, there is a dramatic difference between Ziferblat's visual design in Moscow, London and Manchester. Old Street's eclectic and shabby interior (to my knowledge, largely redesigned by the team since Mitin and Alymkulova left) is to a great extent sourced by the guests, which makes it look very DIY, low-profile and at the same time conducive to self-expression—to put it briefly, Old Street's Minnie Mouse cushion or a hybrid of a Barbie doll and a stuffed toy (an art object made by a guest) would never be displayed in Moscow Ziferblats. Edge Street, in turn, looks much less bohemian than Old Street; as Tammie, a 55-year-old office worker, summarised, *'From what I've heard about this place, I was expecting it to be more hippyish, but it's not hippyish at all... but the chairs are very comfortable, which I like'* (interview, February 2017). 'Comfort' and 'ergonomics' were definitely two guiding principles in Edge's Street design; another one perhaps was 'middle ground'. It is precisely its neutral—or, arguably, middle-class—aesthetic that makes Edge Street open to quite a diverse range of customers, including corporate clients. As Gareth said,

The branch in Shoreditch, although there is a financial district nearby, is not aesthetically pleasant enough to financial institutions to come and use it, and they don't have any meeting space, whereas we look great, we've got the facilities, that's why some of the biggest companies in the UK are our clients. (Interview, October 2016)

Old Street's team, in their turn, were skeptical about Edge Street's *'matching furniture'* and *'fake bookcase wallpaper'*. It is difficult to say whether Edge Street's guests ever donate furniture or decoration items to the venue, as such facts did not come up in the interviews, but it is fair to assume that it does not happen often—perhaps due to the fact that the interior looks very complete and polished, as if it was produced by a professional designer. According to Gareth, most of it was his personal choice, but it also was to a large extent dictated by direct and indirect feedback from the guests, which makes his approach different from that of Moscow teams (*'We always leave at least 20% to be completed after the actual opening so that we could see how the space is being used'*).

As for the piano repertoire, it is very difficult to imagine the Uma2rman incident happening in either Edge Street or Old Street. Although Gareth told me that they

banned a few tunes from being played on the piano (Adele's *Someone Like You*, Rhianna's *Unfaithful* and the theme from *Twilight*), the reason for that was their excessive popularity, and overall this ban is framed more like a friendly joke, making one feel like a regular introduced to a private joke: *'We're just so sick of hearing them again and again... every time someone starts playing it, we go over and say, can you please... [laughs]'* (op. cit. interview). The issue of the quality of performance was mentioned only once, by an Old Street host Sara, but her attitude was radically different from that of Moscow staff:

To me it doesn't matter about the quality, it's about the expression and the experience you get from expressing it. And also, a lot of people are really afraid to express themselves musically because they are not very good and it actually feels really good to... so, if you hear someone else singing out of key or making mistakes on the guitar but still going, then more people can adjoin it, and more people can have lowered inhibition and freedom for it.
(Interview, August 2016)

According to many media publications (e.g., Krasnova, 2013; Shamakina, 2014) and staff interviews, the Ziferblat licence agreement required all franchisees to use a uniform playlist created by Mitin for Pokrovka and get his personal approval for every song they would like to add to it, which, unsurprisingly, has never been realised. Not only does this issue illustrate the scope of the founder's curatorial ambitions but it also uncovers the process of power negotiation within the chain and provides yet another lens on the differences between the four branches; most importantly, it gives a very detailed perspective on the mechanisms of placemaking in Ziferblat, so I will dwell on it a bit longer.

6.2.4. Four perspectives on Pink Floyd

As I found out from staff's interviews conducted in Moscow, the above-mentioned 'official' playlist is uploaded in Treehouse's Vkontakte account. I am not aware of the reasons for such placement (perhaps to keep it away from competitors?) but it is definite that it was not inherited from Treehouse—it was created specially for Ziferblat in 2012. Moreover, it was largely crowdsourced, as in June 2012 Mitin opened a discussion in Pokrovka's Vkontakte community, asking its members to attach the tracks that they find *'fitting with the atmosphere of Ziferblat'* and promising them he would *'add the best ones to the playlist'* (Ziferblat Pokrovka, 2012a). Most of the comments were not responded to but as the final playlist demonstrates, many suggestions were accepted. Even though the final choice was Mitin's, he did not comment on anyone's suggestions, apart from only a few (*'Thanks, three out of six <were added to the list>'; 'Have you ever heard that sort of music playing in Ziferblat?! We need something that*

fits the spirit of Ziferblat, not a night club'), so it can be said that the musical identity of this place was initially co-constructed with the guests.

Given that this playlist contains 1,280 tracks and, unlike other Vkontakte publications cited in this dissertation, is only accessible for registered users, I shall take the liberty to describe this selection very roughly as intellectual,²²⁰ standing out, and mostly retro. In terms of genres, it is dominated by classic jazz, rhythm and blues, soul, funk and the 1960s–1970s rock; it also includes a great deal of indie, new wave and synth-pop music from 1980s–2010s and a few afrobeat and bossa nova tracks. Although it mixes a narrowly known Scandinavian dream-pop band with the big names (e.g., Miles Davis, Elvis Presley, Frank Sinatra, Aretha Franklin, Beatles, Rolling Stones), the latter are mostly represented by their B-sides rather than standards. In terms of cultural context, this playlist provides quite a rare opportunity to hear artists like Janis Joplin, The Velvet Underground, Bob Dylan, or Leonard Cohen, otherwise very well known among Russian melomaniacs, in a public place that is not a specialised music club or vinyl shop. However, two categories of music are remarkably absent from this selection. First, there are almost no Russian titles, except for a few nostalgic tracks and hidden gems from the Soviet times. Second, contrary to what one might have expected, keeping in mind the 'high culture' ambitions of Pokrovka, there is no classical music on this playlist at all (perhaps live baroque concerts compensate for this). A certain attempt has been made by Mitin to instruct the staff on orchestrating the mood, as there are three little sub-categories, each containing up to six songs, with the following descriptions:

TENDER TRANQUILITY. Imagine that Ziferblat is your girlfriend. She just wake up, she is a bit grumpy, her hair is messed up. This is the most beautiful time, dreamy and meditative. Everyone is doing their things, they are not really awake, but they are already here in Ziferblat with you.

INVIGORATION. The morning has gone but the evening has not arrived yet. Everyone is awake and invigorated. Some people are working, others are chatting. Everyone is optimistic, the future is bright.

MINGLING. There are many people in Ziferblat, they are socialising, and you want to fuel this lively and vibrant atmosphere.

When I started my ethnography in Pokrovka in 2016 (not knowing yet when and how this official playlist was created), one of the first comments in my fieldnotes was 'The

²²⁰ No personal aesthetic judgement is intended here; I use this adjective very cautiously to summarise a set of stereotypes associated with that kind of music (at least in the Russian cultural context) and link it to the Moscow Ziferblats' cultural policy. For instance, when one of the guests was telling me about one time when he stayed in Pokrovka overnight, fell asleep and was woken up by the loud sounds of Aretha Franklin, he emphasised that although it was a bit annoying, he liked the very fact of '*being woken up by Aretha Franklin, not by some outcasts shouting outside the window*' (Pyotr, interview, December 2016). It is remarkable how Ziferblat's choice of music not only creates the sense of belonging for some guests but also constructs the image of a safe haven protecting 'civilised' people from the undesirables.

*music makes it all feel like a time machine journey to 2011-2012.*²²¹ Looking from today, to this can be added: no surprise, as this playlist has never been updated.

Nevertheless, over the course of these four years, Pokrovka's hosts have asserted their right to participate in placemaking by playing the music of their choice in addition to the approved playlist:

A.K.: Who makes playlist decisions here?

Nikita: It's all anarchy.

A.K.: I've heard that it used to be very strictly controlled.

Nikita: Yes, indeed, and I never liked it. I always played what I wanted. Of course, I wouldn't play something weird...

A.K.: So, now you guys can choose the music here yourself?

Nikita: Well, Indira still... she always goes: 'What the hell is playing right now?', and I'm like: 'My shift—my music.' But I'm trying to play normal things anyway. It's just that she's been working here for quite a while, she got used to... she has a certain canon for the playlist. But every host plays their own playlists anyway. Almost everyone has their own [Vkontakte] playlist called 'Z', and they'll play it. Whatever one finds comfortable for their work.

(Interview, Pokrovka, July 2016)

This fragment is remarkable in two regards. First, it shows how Mitin's vision of Ziferblat, initially forced on Pokrovka's hosts in the form of a brand standard and then eventually contested by them, is in fact perpetuated through their self-censorship. Although some titles recorded in my 2016 fieldnotes are not on the official playlist, they stick to it very closely in terms of genre (there was only one time when I heard a host playing a rap, hip hop and R&B playlist in Pokrovka, which was extremely at odds with the environment). Second, it sheds light on the imbalanced power dynamic between staff and guests, as the former hold the privilege of playing what they like, which involves the possibility of self-expression and the pleasure of sharing their favourite music with everyone else. During my ethnography, I have seen hosts interrupting one track to play another because they found it irritating or because their mood has changed (as one of them said, rushing to the staff laptop, *'I only like these first 20 seconds, and then they just start screaming the same thing again and again'*); furthermore, contrary to Mitin's mood management guidelines, their choice does not always fit the current situation in the venue:

It's a very quiet and peaceful Tuesday's evening, 7.30pm. There are only five guests in the main room. Everything seems to be in perfect harmony: one guest is playing guitar very gently, others are reading or working. Next

²²¹ Which is when indie, new wave and synth-pop, that happened to be playing most of the time I spent in Pokrovka, became especially popular among Russian creative class youth.

second he finishes a piece, the host turns on the music – something loud and upbeat. The guitarist starts playing again, this time almost inaudibly. (Fieldnotes from Pokrovka, June 2016)

From my further research it became clear that not just Pokrovka but the whole chain has eventually been given a relatively free hand in controlling Ziferblat's soundscape. As Alymkulova explained,

We haven't been keeping such a strict watch on it for some time now. If we become aware that someone is playing Tarkan,²²² we raise a red flag. We make a call and say: nope, dudes, ain't gonna work. But yes, there is a rule that we have an official playlist and all Ziferblats play it. It's not very long though, so many of them start playing something else. (Interview, July 2016)

According to Maya, Tverskaya's team uses the official playlist 'as a source of inspiration' and an important element of the induction training:

It is very important for a new person to give it a listen so that they understand the ideology and taste of Ziferblat. If they come here and say: 'Let's play Pink Floyd!', we'll say: 'Whoa, whoa, dude, Pink Floyd is surely great, but we've got such and such music, look.' Because music is an important element of the atmosphere. (Interview, July 2016)

This comment on Pink Floyd seems a bit strange at first blush, considering that the original playlist includes four songs by this band (*Julia Dream*; *Green is the Colour*; *Paint Box*; *San Tropez*), though one might characterise them as easy listening. Throughout my fieldwork in Tverskaya, to my surprise, I mostly heard standards and greatest hits that would have been considered too 'simple' by Pokrovka's team (e.g., Dave Brubeck's *Take Five*, Doris Day's *Que Sera Sera*). Another difference is the fact that Tverskaya sticks to the 1940s–1950s jazz, pop and rock'n'roll end of Ziferblat's genre spectrum, which, along with the interior design of this branch, immerses its guests in the atmosphere of a respectable old apartment.

Due to the fact that the official Ziferblat's playlist was not transferable from Vkontakte to other platforms, Russian management prepared a very small—presumably exemplary—selection for their English partners. However, both London and Manchester branches chose to ignore this list, albeit for different reasons. Whereas Gareth from ZUKI explained this decision with technical inconvenience ('*There were only about 40 tracks on it, so, if you are here long enough, you would hear all the tracks twice, every day, and it was, like, "no-no-no", so we have a Spotify account, and hosts choose their own music*'),²²³ to Evan from Old Street it was rather a matter of asserting his and his team's right to placemaking:

²²² Turkish pop singer who was popular in Russia in the 1990s.

²²³ Interview, Edge Street, October 2016.

A.K.: To what extent is your work here being coordinated from Moscow? Do they provide any guidelines?

Evan: They used to, a lot. But we've worked for independence. Yeah, we like to make our own decisions.

A.K.: I've heard something about them controlling the playlist...

Evan: [sarcastically] They can try. I have full respect for the Russian team and what they do, but I think they also now respect that we know the need of the people here better than they do.

Although Old Street's hosting guidelines, designed by Evan, include some instructions about music (just like Mitin, he emphasised the mood management aspect), they are, in fact, very brief and flexible:

Music: pretty much anything out of the metal or club scene can work in Ziferblat depending on the current mood of the space, play around with it: use electro-swing to generate some energy, some acoustic summer music to relax stressed workers, be mindful of the writer's group wanting wordless music. If you're unsure or searching for inspiration, check in with the other Hosts and I'm sure they'll have some suggestions. (ZLHG, 2015)

One of the hosts, Kevin, who used to work at an internet radio station before he joined Ziferblat, created a couple of playlists for Old Street on Spotify; as I found out from other staff interviews, hosts typically use one of those or choose their own music (as Sara noted, *'depending on whether I feel like sharing my music or not'*). Overall, the range of genres one can encounter in Old Street is a bit wider than in Pokrovka (e.g., punk and alternative are not uncommon here), and hosts have the freedom to linger over a certain artist as long as they please (thus, once I heard someone playing Pink Floyd's *The Dark Side of the Moon* as a full album).

But the most striking difference between Moscow and London is how Old Street's team shift the power from themselves to the guests. For instance, Evan said in his interview that he likes to *'go around and ask guests what they like to listen to'* (op. cit.); apart from that, unless the venue is overcrowded, hosts show the vinyl player and the collection of vinyl to each newcomer and encourage them to put something on. Furthermore, even the playlists created by Kevin are first and foremost guest-centred rather than Ziferblat-centred; note also how, while acknowledging that music selection is to a large extent a matter of personal taste, he nonetheless does not consider his taste an absolute:

I collected things that I think people would like, but I didn't pick a genre, I just picked a mood of relaxing and uplifting, and not that many lyrics, just music. And something I've started to do is to encourage guests to create playlists, and if they send me the playlist, I'll put it on, so when they come in, they can choose the music. (...) I think relaxing music doesn't interrupt, but I don't want it to be too much a background music, it's a balance. (...) Every host... they also have the option of putting their own music that they like. We don't dictate the music. One of the things that it's not a science

always, so it's always down to taste. It's just what I like. I haven't heard anyone saying they don't like it but if someone... music is subjective, so some people might not like it but it's music, you can't please everyone.
(Kevin, interview, Old Street, September 2016)

Despite this guest-centred approach, Old Street's musical policy leaves enough space for staff's personal preferences, which do not always comply with the common atmosphere in the venue, i.e. tracks played in the afternoon, when most guests are using Ziferblat as a workspace, are at times more emotion- and information-loaded and loud (or, using James's words, too far from background music) than it would be comfortable in such a situation, which, on the other hand, feeds into an image of an independent, creative and unpolished space.

Contrastingly, Edge Street's Spotify playlist, mostly comprised of popular hits, instrumental jazz, lounge and chillout and always played on a comfortable volume level, makes it sound like a family-friendly coffeeshop.²²⁴ Continuing the Pink Floyd parallel, this branch would (and does) play *Money* rather than some less known songs, like in Pokrovka, or an entire album, like in Old Street. Overall, Edge Street's staff are trying to keep the music as neutral as possible, in accordance with their goal to attract as many demographics as possible:

Some of the hosts... obviously, I can't keep an eye all the time on what are they listening to and putting on... sometimes I've come in and I've heard some atrocious rude rap or something like that, I'm, like, 'Oh my god!' Samantha, a 70-year-old woman [a regular – A.K.], is sat in the corner, like: 'Huh?', I'm, like: 'Turn this off!' [laughs]. So I try and go with, sort of, oldies, classics, that sort of things, or just, like, instrumental music. But yeah, it's a difficult one. So, I try and choose music that, I think, everybody would not be... insulted by. All this sort of thing, like classics, that people would know... It's a difficult one to do because of the wide group of people that you've got. Ben hates the music being loud, Gareth loves it when it's on, he loves something really fun and funky, and Ben likes it to be calm and instrumental and really quiet, and I am, sort of, in-between. (...) you just do it by what you can see and what sort of vibe you get from everybody else.
(Tracey, branch manager, interview, Edge Street, November 2016)

This fragment demonstrates that, even though Edge Street's playlist is very guest-oriented, hosts still have a certain agency in this regard, which is nonetheless limited by the power of middle and top management (it is also remarkable how this hierarchy seems to create a parent-kid dynamic in the team).

²²⁴ Another ZUKI branch, Albert Dock in Liverpool, went even further towards popular music, as they play Smooth FM radio instead of an independently created playlist.

6.2.5. 'It's a compromise': Ziferblat's event policy

The only one dimension of curation that seems to be equally important to all four branches is their selective event policy. According to the interviews with staff, all four Ziferblats fully recognise events as a significant source of profit. Public events arranged by local teams or external bodies attract more customers to the venue,²²⁵ which is why event management is often included in branch manager and host job descriptions,²²⁶ whereas private ones make for a relatively easy income stream, as in this case Ziferblat only provides its space, renting it out without any creative or organisational work involved. This difference affects the selection criteria, though, as is the case with many other aspects of Ziferblat, the overall ethical and aesthetic policy of each branch is another important factor.

In Pokrovka, public events must be educationally or culturally driven and tasteful, i.e. compliant with the team's criteria of taste, which strictly excludes all forms of esoteric, spiritual and occult activities (e.g., astrology, Tarot readings) and life coaching and career development workshops (as the hosts sarcastically exemplified in their interviews: *'Release Your Inner Woman: How to Seduce All Men on Earth'*, *'The Ideology of Love'*, or *'How to Earn a Million in Two Days'*); it is no coincidence that all the aforesaid are quite popular in the vast majority of non-Ziferblat anti-cafes in Russia. One example of an externally organised public event that the team considered truly fitting Ziferblat concept is a series of film & lecture events held at Pokrovka in collaboration with the Moscow International Festival of Visual Anthropology: *'Anthropologists were presenting those great documentaries... that was exactly our thing—entertaining but educative, at the intersection of art and science'* (Nikita, interview, July 2016). Tverskaya, judging from the interview with the branch manager, has a slightly more flexible event policy, as its rooms can be privately hired for all purposes, except for the events involving alcohol or something completely out of place, like *'parties with go-go dancers'* or *'voodoo dolls and spirit rapping'*; she also emphasised that her team is struggling with organising decent public events that would comply with the high cultural standards of the brand: *'It's Ziferblat, we can't go catch-as-catch-can'* (Maya, July 2016).

²²⁵ Such events can be free entry (each guest pays by the minute) or ticketed (with a fixed price which is not much higher than a pay-by-the-minute equivalent).

²²⁶ In Pokrovka, applicants are typically required to suggest an event project as a test assignment; moreover, it is specifically stressed that film nights will not count—presumably because it is considered too simple or standard (which, on the other hand, does not mean that there are no film nights in Pokrovka—an example will be discussed further).

Although at first glance Old Street and Edge Street appear to share the above-mentioned principles, their event policies are in fact more elaborate but at the same time more flexible than those of their Moscow colleagues. In both London and Manchester, staff cling to the notion that public events must *'benefit the community'*, *'create a layer above what you would normally guess in a cafe or coffeeshop'*, stay away from politics and religion, and not offend anyone's values, views or identities (summarised from the interviews with Ben and Gareth from Edge Street and Kevin and Sara from Old Street). On the other hand, the ZUKI team is more tolerant of esoteric and spiritual events than the Moscow branches; as Gareth said, they would not turn down something *'slightly faith driven or personal belief driven'*, like crystal healing, because *'it's not the extreme. We don't deal with the extremes. Astrology would be fine too, as long as it's tasteful'* (interview, October 2016). Similarly, Old Street hosted a series of workshops called *Astrology for Artists*; the following extract from the interview with the branch manager shows how this team negotiates between the ethical (Ziferblat's values), the aesthetic, and the commercial:

We weren't sure, it's almost crossing the line. But the girl who organised it is a performance artist, she's doing things about the history of the body, about her ancestry, about the artist's life journey, and she's very talented. We are trying to support independent artists. Astrology is her other passion, and she wants to integrate these two fields, that's why we... This event doesn't bring us much profit, we gave her a Monday evening slot, which is not very popular for bookings. She has a discount, so she pays us only £4 from a person, it's precious little. But we earn something anyway, it brings some people in here. It's a compromise. But it's also an investment: she's a talented artist, and if we give her a platform now, she will tell her followers about us and she will come back again with another project. Not everybody in the team is ok with that though... but what she's doing is so beautiful, she's showing that astrology can also be an art. (Alex, November 2016)

Both Old Street and Edge Street thoroughly consider each event proposal but rarely say a strict 'no', unless they are approached with an offer that explicitly violates their values (Old Street once refused to host a pickup artistry workshop) or conflicts with the law (Edge Street turned down a person who wanted to hire the whole venue for a party where female dancers and drugs were going to be involved). Unlike the Moscow Ziferblats, the London and Manchester teams allow alcohol at privately organised events, albeit the Old Street staff do not feel entirely comfortable about it:

Those who bring alcohol to their events usually tend to treat the space more consumptively. You'll need to clean up after them and, overall, it feels like they are simply exploiting the space. So, we are always keeping in mind the balance between making money and staying within our framework. The financial aspect is what we always begin with, because we are a business. So, we are always trying to compromise... all solutions are case-by-case. (Ibid.)

When it comes to public externally organised events, Old Street sticks to the opposite pole of the social/commercial dialectic: no other Ziferblat seems to be so dedicated to community building as this one is. As Kevin, a host, summarised, '*We mostly encourage events that have the community spirit and they can bring people from a variety of backgrounds*' (interview, September 2016). Although this orientation is very different from the civilising mission of Moscow Ziferblats, Old Street's event policy is largely based on their personal judgements, just like in Pokrovka and Tverskaya: '*We don't book events we wouldn't go to ourselves*' (Ibid.), albeit in the case of Old Street these judgements are mostly driven by ethics rather than aesthetics. For instance, it is very unlikely that either of the Moscow Ziferblats would ever agree to host a public talk entitled *Overcoming Jealousy and Opening the Heart*, whereas Old Street always welcomes life coaching events if they '*deal with the issues of self-awareness and wellbeing rather than achievement and success*' (Alex, op. cit. interview).

It is difficult to say to what extent Ziferblat's licence controls (or used to control) event policy across the chain, but it seems that this part was the most flexible. In my interviews with both Moscow teams, I heard a few disapproving comments about some other Russian Ziferblats, e.g. '*They have tons of events and make good money, but we don't want anything of that kind here*', '*It's nothing wild but it's crossing the line, like career events*'; when I asked if they have any power to change it, I got the following answer: '*We hardly can. It's their private matter and it's another city, another audience*'. In chapter 7, I will discuss the dispute between Ziferblat Worldwide and Old Street about queer-themed events hosted in the latter branch. That said, Mitin reserved the right to dictate his tastes to the local teams on minor issues, which seems rather to cultivate an image of an eccentric innovator (cf. Steve Jobs, Elon Musk) rather than making any real impact on placemaking. According to Gareth from ZUKI, '*One thing is absolutely not allowed—flower arranging. It's on our licence agreement, because Ivan doesn't like flower arranging*' (Interview, October 2016).

All in all, despite Mitin's attempts to assume his aesthetic power over the concept of Ziferblat, local teams have eventually managed to assert their own right to placemaking. Nevertheless, management/staff and staff/guests power dynamics still largely vary widely across the chain.

Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the contradictions between Ziferblat's overarching ethical principles—non-hierarchy and participation—and its in many regards suppressive cultural politics, especially in Moscow branches, where the perceived cultural gap, attributed to the aftermath of the (post-)Soviet period, was addressed with a paradoxical mixture of the Soviet notion of culturedness and a superficial and elitist interpretation of the creative city concept. Whereas Moscow's Ziferblats are enclaves, or, more precisely, social condensers, bringing together the cultured and civilising the uncultured, in London and Manchester (especially in the latter) they are recognised as a part of local creative industries, commodifying the ideology of inclusivity and diversity.

Even though Ziferblat is positioned as an environment co-created with the customers (Ahmed, 2016), Moscow teams, acting like curators, are very unwilling to share their aesthetic power with the guests. Ironically—given how they often call themselves cultural centres—Pokrovka and Tverskaya shared the destiny of the UK cultural centres that have been increasingly losing their originally democratic and participatory ethos since the late 1970s due to privatisation and, hence, professionalisation (Phillips, 2017). However, as the example of Edge Street demonstrates, a profit-driven (but customer-oriented) approach, while threatening aesthetic diversity and authenticity, results in a greater social diversity.

As follows from the analysis of Ziferblat's policies regarding interior and soundscape design and event organisation, management/staff and staff/guests power dynamics differ significantly across the chain: thus, Pokrovka offers a great democracy for the team, while being the least open to the guests' participation. The inter-branch dynamic, in the course of which local teams have been asserting their right to placemaking, illustrates Ziferblat's heterotopic nature: it is simultaneously a business and a sociocultural placemaking project, a chain and an independent enterprise, a structure and an anti-structure.

The next chapter will further explore the issues of participation, social inclusion and commodification in the context of social interaction in Ziferblat.

Chapter 7. Social media for social change: sociability, community, and possibility

As mentioned in chapter 4, Mitin used the concept of social media as a symbol of the sociability, community, inclusivity, accessibility and democracy he envisioned in Ziferblat. At the same time, he wanted these principles to be embodied in a physical 'space of appearance' (Arendt, 1958). Thus, these two aspirations were blended in a post-digital metaphor of 'social media in real life'.

It is, perhaps, only natural for a digital native like Mitin to come from the assumptions of 'cyberoptimism' (Norris, 2001). To quote Simon Lindgren (2017: 61), '[c]onnections, sharing, participation, peer production, coordination, creativity, mobilization—these are some of the buzzwords crucial to the optimist view on how the internet and social media will change society for the better'. However, this metaphor overlooks the fact that many problems of 'real' social life are paralleled in the online realm. Just as access to ICT to many is hampered by 'digital divide' (Norris, op. cit.), access to Ziferblat is often impeded by social inequalities. Furthermore, as follows from the analysis presented in chapters 5 and 6, Ziferblat did not escape the problem of commodification, appropriation and exploitation of participatory culture in Web 2.0 (Tkacz, 2015; Jenkins et al., 2016). Another issue—the commodification of community—was highlighted by one of the internet commenters under the Guardian's article on Ziferblat: *'Just like Facebook which freely allows you to develop you[r] social life through its services, only to "sell" this social life back to you, Ziferblat seems to trade in the "lost" sense of community'* (Baker, 2014).

This chapter will explore the construction of sociability and community in Ziferblat and critically evaluate its potential for social change. Section 6.1 will provide a detailed analysis of the 'right props [and] rules' (Peattie, 1998: 248) encouraging conviviality in Ziferblat, focusing on the intersections of the offline and online realms and activities, and then conclude with a critical discussion on the impact of this increased conviviality on individuals. Section 6.2 will continue with the evaluation of the societal impact of Ziferblat, focusing on such aspects as social inclusion and diversity, alternative economies and infra-/proto-/parapolitics (De Cauter and Dehaene, 2008).

7.1. The architecture of conviviality: social interaction and community building in Ziferblat

As follows from my ethnography and interviews, sociability in Ziferblat mainly relies on subtle social ties, just like in cafes (Hall, 2009; Wise, 2011; Tjora, 2013; Dokk Holm,

2013; Jones et al., 2015). What makes it different from cafes, though, is how easily these subtle ties form and how quickly they can strengthen in Ziferblat. To quote Sara, an Old Street host,

Remember those guys playing a board game yesterday? If you looked at them, you'd expect that everyone knew each other for ages but they haven't—only two people knew each other beforehand. You get that sort of communities that look like they are communities but they are communities that have just met. (Interview, August 2016)

Over the course of my research I have heard numerous stories from and about Ziferblat's guests whose casual acquaintances eventually grew into real friendships, romantic partnerships, flat-sharing and co-travelling experiences, or art or business collaborations. At the same time, many guests in Russia and the UK described their Ziferblat encounters as brief but pleasant experiences of a temporary community with no commitments:

You don't necessarily become friends but, I guess, in a place like this, it's even more enjoyable when you can find some people, not permanent friends that you have obligations to, but just some nice people you can talk with if you want. It is so easy and fun; I feel no inhibitions here, because there are no commitments. (Pyotr, Pokrovka regular, interview, December 2016)

In what follows, I will discuss how various socio-spatial factors affect conviviality in Ziferblat, producing subtle ties that link guests into temporary and, potentially, longer-term communities. But before proceeding to this discussion, I will challenge 'the myth of unbounded sociability' (Bancroft et al., 2014) encoded in Mitin's metaphor of 'social media in real life'.

7.1.1. Sociability in Ziferblat: between bubbling and mingling

As mentioned in subsection 4.1.3, despite the fact that many guests in Russia and the UK perceived Ziferblat as the solution to the lack of unmediated social interaction in contemporary urban life, they did not explicitly refer to Mitin's 'social media in real life' metaphor in their interviews. Similarly, local teams, even in Moscow, were not particularly keen on using this formula when introducing Ziferblat to newcomers—arguably because it was the least tangible of all metaphors describing this space. However, there was one guest in Pokrovka who not merely called Ziferblat a physical embodiment of a social networking site but happened to come up with this metaphor completely independently (as it turned out, he had no idea that it had been used by the founder since 2012). Unsurprisingly, his interpretation was quite different from that of Mitin:

Yastrebov: I'm actually not a public person... I don't have social media accounts, so Ziferblat is like a social communication platform for me. Coming here is something like opening your Facebook page.

A.K.: You mean, it's your public space?

Yastrebov: Yes, it's my public space but it also lets me stay non-public if I don't want to be involved. It lets you be present without actually being present.

(Interview, Pokrovka, December 2016)

In contrast to Mitin, who celebrates social media—and, consequently, Ziferblat—for their bonding potential, this guest highlighted the other side of this metaphor: just like ‘digital flâneurs’ (boyd, 2008), Ziferblat guests can refrain from direct interactions and use the space in a ‘silent community’ (Dokk Holm, 2013) mode.

This duality has manifested itself throughout the interviews and observations in all four branches. As my analysis of the data suggests, levels of sociability in Ziferblat fluctuate between two extremities that can be called bubbling and mingling. The first term is inspired by Lofland’s (1998: 12) observations on how family and friendship ties create little bubbles of private space within public territories in the city, which has been later extended by numerous studies on how the use of portable communication devices cocoons people from the urban public realm (for an overview, see Hampton and Gupta, 2008: 835). As is the case with other public places, those who come to Ziferblat with company and/or use mobile devices while being there create a bubble of privacy around them. However, it does not necessarily mean that they are less likely to form new social ties—as will be shown below, sociability in anti-cafes is shaped by a multitude of socio-spatial factors, and neither having companions nor using devices is decisive in this regard.

On the one hand, when Ziferblat’s guests use the space as a ‘silent community’ environment for their individual or collective work or leisure, devices create a bubble of copresent or even colocated but still private ties around them. The latter often involves a scene one can easily encounter in a library or a laptop-friendly cafe: a couple (not necessarily romantic partners) or a small group of friends/peers sit together but hardly exchange a word, each being occupied with their own device. Apart from such more or less standard situations, throughout my fieldwork I have come across a relatively novel form of public privatism where couples (in this case, most likely but still not necessarily romantically involved ones) share a laptop, tablet or smartphone (typically with a pair of earphones) to watch videos, TV shows or films together, practising mediated intimacy in a public setting.

On the other hand, the use of ICT in Ziferblat provides simple but efficient ice-breaking props creating subtle ties, which, in turn, often develop into more meaningful interactions. Just like cafe patrons observed by Tjora (2013), Ziferblat's guests in all four branches are keen on helping each other with wifi passwords or software glitches and keeping an eye on each other's devices during temporary absences. Moreover, on a number of occasions I witnessed solo visitors obviously struggling to strike up a conversation with someone sitting next to them, finally coming up with a could-you-please-keep-an-eye-on-my-phone opener, leaving, coming back in just a couple of minutes and only then starting to chat. Those who feel insecure in Ziferblat—first and foremost newcomers and solo visitors—often use their devices as something in-between a confidence booster and an 'involvement shield'. The latter term, coined by Goffman (1963) as a designation for objects used by individuals in a public place to signal their unavailability for interaction (books, newspapers, magazines), has afterwards been applied to mobile phones, music players, tablets and laptops (Hampton and Gupta, 2008; Ito et al., 2009; Henriksen and Tjora, 2018). Slightly contrary to this tradition, my ethnography revealed the ambivalent role of ICT in Ziferblat—while some guests indeed use devices (as well as books and printed media) to protect themselves from interactions, others employ them as some sort of security blanket supporting them in an uncomfortable situation of being on one's own in a space perceived as intended for socialising (or, perhaps, helping them to adjust to the socio-spatial ambiguity of a multifunctional space):

I usually bring a newspaper, and if there is an opportunity to talk to someone, I usually try. (Vincent, Old Street guest, interview, February 2017)

I chat with that guy [a newcomer who came with his girlfriend—A.K.] as we wash dishes side by side: 'Did you enjoy your visit today?'—'Yes, I like it a lot. Will grab a laptop next time though.'—'To do some work?'—'No... just, you know, to have something to do [when I'm on my own].' (Fieldnotes, Pokrovka, July 2016)

However, a person scrolling down the newsfeed while glancing at people around is not necessarily a shy newcomer waiting to be engaged in a conversation by someone more confident—it might also be a regular killing time before a meeting or even a staff member on a break. Unlike Hampton and Gupta's (2008) dichotomy of 'true mobiles' and 'placemakers', bubbling and mingling are rather two poles of the spectrum of sociability in multifunctional anti-cafe spaces than two fixed types of the anti-cafe clientele (cf. also the description of 'the loner' vs. 'the social guest' in Henriksen et al. (2013) study on cafes). Furthermore, anti-cafes are spatially and socially organised in such a way that one's switch from bubbling to mingling or vice versa can happen instantly.

Before moving to the discussion of these socio-spatial factors, one important point should be mentioned. Although no one is ever explicitly judged for bubbling in Ziferblat, mingling seems to predominate in staff's reflections on and representations of the desired image of the space. This is true for all branches except Edge Street, where team members did not seem to prioritise between these two ways of being in Ziferblat. In London and Moscow interviews, hosts and managers described an ideal guest²²⁷ as a person who is open to interact with strangers and become a part of community. Throughout the ethnography, staff would also point my attention to various manifestations of conviviality—for instance, a goodbye hug between people who met here just a few hours ago or a cake brought by a newcomer on her second visit to share with her new friends—accompanying such scenes with comments like *'This is what we love about Ziferblat'* or *'This is what Ziferblat is for'*. Likewise, team-controlled media representations portray Ziferblat as a space that is literally permeated with social connections (see the video in: Ziferblat, 2015). Contrastingly, a surprisingly large number of guests stressed the importance of being able to choose (and easily switch if needed) between mingling and bubbling, echoing above-cited Yastrebov from Pokrovka.

That said, the data demonstrate that some Ziferblats are more conducive to mingling, whereas others are more likely to encourage bubbling. In contrast with Old Street and both Moscow Ziferblats, characterised by their staff and guests with two recurrent phrases *'It is easy to talk to strangers here'* and *'It just happens naturally'*, Edge Street was described as a space where, as one of the guests briefly put it, *'everyone is nice and friendly but it feels like they are in their own bubbles'* (Ted, interview, March 2017). To quote Gareth, the ZUKI COO,

Before we sat down and got it on tape, you mentioned this thing about people making friends... British people don't [laughs]. We don't! We had this very whimsical idea when we got involved in Ziferblat, but no. You would have strangers breaking down their social barriers and getting involved... going up to each other and chitchatting and shaking hands and making friends... They don't. That doesn't happen. (Interview, Edge Street, October 2016)

Although this comment suggests that levels of sociability in Ziferblat are to a certain extent affected by cross-cultural differences, the case of Old Street disproves Gareth's hypothesis regarding the alleged lack of conviviality in British culture. This contrast between Edge Street and the three other Ziferblats was always evident in my observations of social interaction between guests, as well as my own interactions—thus, my Manchester fieldnotes are full of comments about how awkward it felt to

²²⁷ That was my direct question—'Who is your ideal guest?'

approach strangers for interviews and how much easier it was in the other three venues. But where exactly does this difference come from?

Throughout my fieldwork, I identified three fundamental socio-spatial factors that affect sociability in Ziferblat: physical design, hosts, and activities, all of which will be discussed below.

7.1.2. Talking appliances and chatty tables: the impact of physical design

According to my findings, smaller and less divided Ziferblats (see Table 1 on p. 45 and section 5.3.1) enable more interactions between strangers. Over the course of my fieldwork, Old Street turned out to be the most sociable branch, followed by Pokrovka. However, two other venues proved to be more problematic in this regard, as the open-space Edge Street is even less sociable than smaller but extremely divided Tverskaya, which suggests that the dependence of sociability upon venue size and layout is not absolute. Another significant factor is zoning and spatial choreography, or, more precisely, areas that can be called interaction hubs—specific zones within Ziferblat where the encounter is almost inevitable. As Oldenburg (2013: 20) once jokingly noted, '[t]he most inclusive American third place ever was the soda fountain.' Similarly, many subtle ties in Ziferblat are established while making drinks, fixing snacks or washing dishes side by side with others. Ziferblat's kitchen interactions are akin to that of an office or shared accommodation kitchen, except that they bring together strangers rather than colleagues or housemates.



Figure 9. 'Social' sink in Pokrovka
Photo taken by the author, July 2016

Some Ziferblats make special efforts to incorporate interaction hubs in the venue design in order to strengthen or mitigate the impact of size and layout on sociability. For instance, the Pokrovka team, apart from turning their coffee machine around to foster interaction and cooperation between guests (see subsection 5.3.1.2), installed a

double bowl sink in the kitchenette with the same intention to encourage informal chats (figure 9). Old Street kitchen, where a manual coffee machine is also open for guests' use, is even more sociable—not least because it is a separate room, which makes people feel more obliged to recognise each other's presence and start small talk (e.g. *'I wonder where they keep Earl Grey...'*; *'Any idea how this toaster works?'*). One of the regulars pointed my attention to a specific social interaction pattern that proved to be recurrent in my observations as well; it can be called 'kettle courtesy': *'When someone pours the kettle to make their tea, if my cup's there, they'll be like: "Do you want...", and they'll just do mine as well'* (Bryan, interview, Old Street, February 2017). In addition, Old Street kitchen is full of handwritten notes playfully explaining how to use the appliances (*'I am the coffee machine. I love you. I just want to make your day better! But I have some rules...'*) or involving them in a game (each guest can create their own poem from a bunch of words typed on the pieces of magnetic paper attached to the fridge; it is not uncommon for strangers to make such poems together).

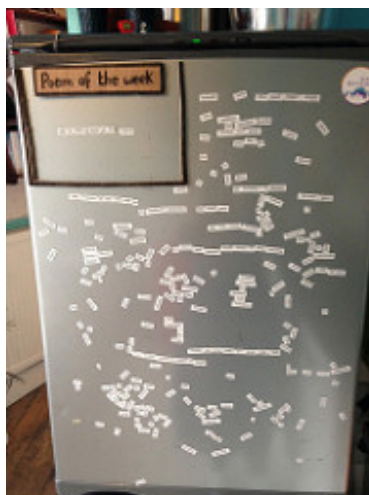


Figure 10. Fridge poetry game in Old Street
Photo taken by the author, April 2016

In Tverskaya, as mentioned in subsection 5.3.1.3, the kitchen is too tiny and hidden to serve as an interaction hub, so this function is performed—to the extent possible—by the counter where staff make drinks for the guests and a self-service tea-making station nearby. Although the process of brewing tea is more straightforward than coffee-making, throughout my ethnography I have witnessed numerous brief interactions between strangers helping each other to find a strainer or teaspoon or make the boiler work (this also applies to Pokrovka).

Edge Street kitchen does not serve as an interaction hub either, although, in contrast to Tverskaya, it was a deliberate choice rather than a limitation of the layout. As mentioned in subsection 5.3.1.5, this kitchen was constructed with the intention to simplify the process of drink and food preparation, thereby allowing for a faster

customer turnover. To quote one of the guests, *'it's like a motorway station'* (cited by Gareth, ZUKI COO, interview, October 2016). There is no manual coffee machine, like in Pokrovka and Old Street, and no opportunity to chat with the hosts while they are making your drink, like in Tverskaya, and, overall, there is no reason for one to linger in Edge Street kitchen. Keeping in mind the traditional differentiation between the private realm as 'the world of the household and friend and kin networks', the parochial realm as 'the world of the neighborhood, workplace, or acquaintance networks', and the public realm as 'the world of strangers and the "street"' (Lofland, 1998: 10), it can be said that Edge Street—to a large extent because of its size—feels like the most public of all Ziferblats, with all ensuing consequences in terms of 'stranger danger' assumptions:

You know, I've tried to have a chat with people in the kitchen, like that girl yesterday... I made a joke to her and it didn't really go down well. She was like: 'I'm just gonna go and sit with my friends', and I was like: 'Ok'. I've sat here [on this sofa] before, and some girls sat over here, and I just said something like: 'Hi, you alright?' and they said 'Hello' but then quickly turned back to what they were doing—they were having a girly catch-up, so I thought—fair enough. (...) I think, it's cultural. British culture is all about 'keep to yourself', 'stick to the people that you know'. Like, if you going to a pub on the countryside, you'll be stared at because you're an outsider. (Byron, Edge Street guest, interview, February 2017)

Judged from Byron's interactions with the hosts that I happened to witness and a neutral and unobtrusive way in which he struck up a conversation with me before I asked him for an interview, one could hardly call his small talk style inappropriate—conversely, he seemed friendly, polite and communication-savvy. It is rather the environment of Edge Street branch (and, again, not British culture per se) that is not conducive to such forms of conviviality between strangers.

In response to this lack of sociability in Edge Street, one of the guests—as Tracey, the branch manager, described him, *'an older guy who had lost his wife recently and he wanted to come somewhere and be approached by people and speak'* (interview, November 2016)—suggested to the team an idea of a 'HAPPY TO CHAT TABLE' sign. Although this idea was immediately put into action, my observations and staff interviews suggest that this transferable sign is used very rarely, if at all. In most cases, guests would not choose a table marked with this sign if there were other seats available; alternatively, they would just remove it or act like it is not there. As guests' interviews demonstrate, they feel curious about this sign (it was always them who brought it up in our conversations, not me), yet skeptical. To quote Byron again, *'it's so much pressure... and it's a bit needy, isn't it? I think it's more natural to do what we are doing now, which is have a seat, crack on with your work, and then strike up a conversation.'* As another guest, Kyle, pointed out, *'the problem with this table is that*

there is no basis for which to actually get everyone together' (interview, February 2017); other guests noticed that having such a sign placed on just one table makes them perceive the rest of the space as 'not happy to chat'.

There is one more—small but important—detail that distinguishes Edge Street from Old Street and both Moscow branches. Even though all four venues offer free wifi and numerous power outlets, allowing the online realm to permeate the physical space of Ziferblat, Pokrovka, Tverskaya and Old Street are also equipped with 'old media'—typewriters²²⁸, vinyl players, vintage radios and TV sets—most of which are used not only for decoration but also for their intended purpose (even the mailbox in Pokrovka, used for an informal correspondence exchange within the venue). Furthermore, Old Street's hosting guidelines include the following tip: *'a great use of the typewriter is to make collaborative stories, each writing one line. Invite guests to get creative, especially if there's an atmosphere or guests are waiting for friends/an event'* (ZLHG, 2015). Being surrounded by such artefacts and, even more so, being able to use them makes a subtle yet significant contribution to Ziferblat's heterochronism and post-digital orientation. This is not the only example of the intricate and ambivalent dialectic between the online and the offline realms in Ziferblat's culture. According to Gareth from Edge Street,

Ivan [Mitin] said that he didn't like the PC on the reception desk. Because, obviously, in London [and all other branches run by Ziferblat Worldwide—A.K.] they don't check you in, they use pieces of paper. We don't do that here. We turn over a lot of money every year, you can't do that with pieces of paper. (Interview, October 2016).

At the same time, Mitin spent a few years working on a Ziferblat mobile application²²⁹ that was finally launched in March 2017. Once registered, guests can choose a branch to be checked in and out, make a payment, collect scores for the time spent or for running some errands (dishwashing etc.), read Ziferblat's news, look who else is at the venue, and even befriend other users. A teenage guest I once overheard in Tverskaya branch commented on this discrepancy in the following way: *'I never friend anyone [on this app], just on principle. It doesn't seem right. In Ziferblat, we should interact offline'* (fieldnotes, March 2017). Furthermore, despite being designed as a distinctively laptop-friendly space (high-speed wifi; plenty of power outlets), Ziferblat, unlike many other anti-cafes all over the world, has a strict policy against video game consoles like Xbox or PlayStation, as they *'disconnect people from each other'* (Ziferblat Worldwide PR director in a personal Facebook status update reposted by the chain management as

²²⁸ Treehouse's typewriter was explicitly called 'our Twitter' (see media report in: Rakhimdzhanova, 2011).

²²⁹ Another interesting example is a live stream screen recently installed by the ZUKI team in another Manchester branch at MediaCityUK to link it with Edge Street like a digital bridge.

‘the manifesto’, see in: Chiornaia, 2015). The fact that Treehouse’s community often played video games from a Dendy console²³⁰ connected to an old Rubin TV set²³¹ (Treehouse, n.d.)—a nostalgic and at the same ironic gesture of postmodern sentimentality—suggests that Mitin’s personal judgements regarding the appropriateness of certain elements of digital culture in Ziferblat were to a large extent aesthetically-driven.

In sum, none of the above-mentioned spatial factors is solely responsible for making one Ziferblat more sociable than another—it is rather a unique combination of venue size and layout, interaction hubs and smaller-scale design solutions (signs; décor). Overall, someone wanting to make a space like Ziferblat convivial would need to make people see and be seen by others (yet allowing for more intimate forms of sociability, like in the Old Street kitchen) and cooperate with each other (cf. Kyle’s comment on Edge Street’s happy-to-chat table—a tactic inviting strangers to make contact but not providing them with any framework for interaction). However, as the example of the Edge Street kitchen demonstrates, a social ethos of conviviality often conflicts with a commercial logic of financial sustainability. Getting back to the factor of venue size again, it is important to note that the Russian team’s choice of the Old Street property was determined by their desire to ‘*minimise the risks when entering the European market*’ (Indira Alymkulova, interview, Pokrovka, July 2016). Similarly, the ZUKI team’s decision to open their first venue in a spacious Edge Street property (and, later, their general spatial requirements for Ziferblat franchise, ranging from 280 to 560 m²)²³² was driven by the same logic:

My first impression of the London branch was... the space was small and the kitchen was small, and I couldn’t see how that would make any money. You know, you’re going to business to make money. It’s not a charitable foundation. You know, Ziferblat for me is my job, it’s my life, this is what I do... I couldn’t see how we could do that on the scale that they were doing it. And, obviously, if you fast-forward to now, I understand that you can’t do on the scale that they are doing it, you have to go big or go home to make it work. (Gareth, ZUKI COO, interview, October 2016)

Even altogether, spatial factors alone are not decisive either, as they can be strengthened (if beneficial) or mitigated (if disadvantageous) by the social drivers of Ziferblats’ conviviality—hosts’ communicative labour and special interactive frameworks.

²³⁰ Dendy was a Taiwanese clone of the Nintendo Entertainment System console, popular in CIS countries in the early 1990s.

²³¹ Rubin was a popular Soviet brand of TV sets.

²³² See more in: ZUKI, 2016b.

7.1.3. When ‘howareyou’ means ‘how are you’: the role of hosts

The role of cafe staff in creating the sense of belonging and community through everyday interpersonal interactions with customers has been widely discussed in the sociology of cafes (Oldenburg, 1989; Rosenbaum et al., 2007; Hall, 2009; Laurier, 2013b; Tjora, 2013). Although the way in which Ziferblat’s hosts interact with the guests is in many respects similar to how it happens in cafes, there are two important differences, stemming from Ziferblat’s self-service framework, the ideological underpinnings and controversial power dynamics of which were discussed in chapter 4.

First, according to their interviews and internal guidelines, Ziferblat’s staff are instructed to refrain from using servicescape communication patterns, in order to maintain more intimate and genuine connection with the guests. However, this rule applies only to the branches run by Ziferblat Worldwide, whereas ZUKI staff are expected to and do structure their interactions with the guests under the framework of customer service (see Ben’s and Gareth’s comments on p. 152). Thus, their typical introductory speech when greeting a newcomer (as some called it in their interviews, ‘the spiel’) is always friendly and polite but at the same time brief and focused; stylistically, it is very similar, if not completely identical, to a check-in talk at a hotel (or, given the self-service model, hostel) reception. Contrastingly, Pokrovka, Tverskaya and Old Street teams make efforts to depart from the conversational routines of commercial hospitality; general recommendations include such principles as ‘*be yourself*’; ‘*be natural*’; ‘*be sincere*’; ‘*don’t turn it into McDonalds*’; ‘*don’t talk like a waiter*’ (summarised from staff interviews and hosting guidelines). As a framed sign in Old Street briefly puts it—as if in response to Laurier’s (2013b) discussion of ‘ritual how-are-yous’ producing the service encounter in cafes—‘*IN THIS PLACE “HOWAREYOU” MEANS “HOW ARE YOU?”*’. As is the case with many other aspects of Ziferblat culture, this striving for authenticity and community has mixed results. Rejecting the etiquette norms of customer service, Ziferblat’s hosts end up relying on their personal communication competence, which can provoke awkward situations:

A host is clocking out two guests, male and female, who just met in the kitchen, started chatting and then decided to go for a walk: ‘So, you guys just met and you’re leaving together already? Wow!’ (fieldnotes, Old Street, September 2016)

A host is chatting to the guests waiting in line as he makes their drinks: ‘Here is your coffee... For you and your beloved lady’—‘Thanks, but she’s not my lady actually.’ Later the same host gives me his phone number so that we could arrange an interview and suddenly addresses a man (newcomer) who is at least twice older than he is: ‘Can give my number to you as well, hahaha!’ (fieldnotes, Tverskaya, July 2016)

Second, Ziferblat's hosts—again, in Moscow and London but not in Manchester—have extended community-building responsibilities, as compared to cafe staff. Unlike the latter, who may or may not act like Nick from Hall's (2009) ethnography of a London caff—a 'public character' (Jacobs, 1961) supporting local social networks—Ziferblat's staff members are required to be mediators and facilitators, or, as Francesca, an Old Street host, put it, '*connectors*' (interview, August 2016) that bring guests together. However, as my ethnography suggests, the impact of such facilitation on Ziferblat's sociability is strongly dependent on spatial factors. The absence of physical boundaries separating hosts from the public in Old Street and Pokrovka results in a higher rate of interactions between them. Furthermore, even though Old Street is the smallest branch, its hosts give every newcomer a tour, and on some occasions, if it is not too crowded, introduce them to other guests. In Tverskaya, hosts compensate for the venue size, layout and zoning limitations by engaging guests in a common chat while they are queuing at the counter to check in/out or get their drinks, though, again, it works only when it is not too crowded. Contrastingly, the Edge Street branch requires constant physical maintenance structured around food (see p. 148), which does not leave the hosts much time for chatting with guests; moreover, there are no zones within this venue where guests could informally interact with the hosts long enough—once checked in, they rarely feel the need to approach the reception desk until the end of their visit. Nevertheless, there is a pattern that seems to be common for all Ziferblats: the more one interacts with the hosts, the more other guests they 'connect' them to—sooner or later, in one way or another. The following extract from the interview with Sara, an Old Street host, illustrates what a subtle process it is:

Sometimes you see that they maybe came for making new friends, but they just sit with their laptops and don't know what to do. So I tend to pick up on those people and introduce them... or I'll sit and start conversation with them and then with another person who I know is new and solo, or I take people here and here, and then, when the three of them get going, I'll go off and do other things. (Interview, August 2016)

There is one tactic used by Pokrovka and Old Street hosts that I found especially noteworthy in this regard. When a guest asks hosts if they can spare a charger for a certain device, they usually answer, '*Let's go and ask other guests if they have any*'. In their interviews, hosts explained that this is a thought-out move—and, one might add, a post-digital one by nature, as in this case ICT devices are indirectly used for encouraging interaction and cooperation between strangers. Furthermore, in London and both Moscow branches hosts sometimes literally bring 'digital nomads' back offline by cheerful and sympathetic comments (e.g. '*Don't forget to drink water!*') or even fixing a snack for them. That said, even in Old Street, the smallest branch, a host's efficiency as such a 'connector' maintaining social cohesion is limited by their

emotional resources and time. To a large extent, this limitation is compensated by special interactive frameworks.

7.1.4. Eat, play, talk: special interactive frameworks

As mentioned in previous chapters, each Ziferblat holds various events and meet-ups. Some of them produce social ties as a byproduct of edutainment and cultural production and consumption (e.g., lectures, concerts, film nights), while others are specifically focused on socialising). The latter, in turn, include gatherings intended for specific social groups (e.g. Creative Writers' Meet-up in Old Street, Freelance Friday in Manchester) and more inclusive frameworks, not based on special interest or shared identity. Getting back to Kyle's comment on the importance of having a '*basis for which to get everyone together*' (p. 195), such frameworks, including both organised events and spontaneous practices, are typically based on commensality, board games and/or hosts' facilitation.

In Pokrovka, spontaneous commensality (bringing fruit, cakes, pies to share; cooking dinners for everyone) is not as frequent as it was in Treehouse but still not uncommon; it is accompanied by the weekly 'five-o'clock tea' (meaning British-style afternoon tea)—an event where everyone present in the venue is invited to join the common table for a cup of tea, biscuits and toast. In Tverskaya, as mentioned before, spontaneous socialising is complicated by the venue size and layout; to compensate for these limitations, the local team organises the Monday Dinner (a weekly event where a host, local or guest cooks a common hot meal; grocery expenses are typically covered by the venue) and the Sunday Brunch (a similar weekly event organised in summer months). In Old Street—again, to a large extent because of its size and layout—strangers often share food and make snacks together; in addition, hosts organise the Ziferbrunch every Sunday afternoon. Unlike the Moscow branches, the Old Street team encourages guests to bring food to share rather than provides a shared meal, thereby turning budget limitations into a community building opportunity. In Edge Street, as demonstrated in subsection 7.1.2, an attempt to share a meal with a stranger would likely be considered strange or even suspicious. Although this branch holds private meet-ups and events involving commensal eating in meeting rooms (e.g., supper club meetings), no practices of that kind occur in the main space. According to Gareth, they tried to follow Mitin's recommendation to organise afternoon tea events, but it did not work out because guests were not very keen on interrupting their activities and joining a common table with strangers (interview, October 2016).

Nevertheless, in all four branches spontaneous and organised commensal practices often involve multicultural encounters. In contrast to what bell hooks (1992) called

‘eating the other’, i.e. exploitative consumption of ethnic difference, Ziferblat’s guests have a chance to eat *with* the other. In Moscow branches, staff and guests volunteering to cook common dinners often choose to introduce others to their national cuisine (e.g., Armenian, Jewish). The London team shared an even more interesting example where a commensal meal reconnected Ziferblat’s guests with the pre-gentrification culture of Hackney’s Nigerian community:

We hosted an exhibition recently—it’s a muralist whose family used to live here in Hackney before the gentrification. His mom cooked two huge pans of Nigerian Jollof rice, brought them to the opening party, shared stories... It was like a family gathering, but for seventy people [laughs]. (Alex, Old Street branch manager, interview, November 2016)

The example of Edge Street demonstrates that even though this branch is not conducive to commensality beyond private groups, the very opportunity to bring one’s own food to the venue, legitimised by Ziferblat, allows for such rare forms of the multicultural encounter as seeing a group of international students—stigmatised even more than just ‘students’—introducing each other to their national cuisines in a public place outside campus:

We’ve had foreign students, about fifteen of them, and they would all bring a dish from their home cuisine, heat it up in our microwaves and oven, sit down and have a gigantic meal together. They’ve all obviously met very recently but were making the effort to make friends... (Tracey, Edge Street branch manager, interview, November 2016)

During my fieldwork, apart from witnessing many brief episodes of spontaneous commensality in Moscow and London, I participated in one ‘five-o’clock tea’ and two dinners (one spontaneous and one scheduled) in Pokrovka and Tverskaya. All three events mixed together newcomers, regulars, locals and hosts, but the atmosphere of both dinners (Pokrovka and Tverskaya) was more relaxed and natural than that of the tea event in Pokrovka. To my surprise, it was organised in a very ritualistic and staged manner. While setting the table, the host, assisted by two other staff members, told one of them to take the biscuits out of the box and put them all on a plate, ‘so *that it looks prettier*’; when they were done, she asked another host to take a photo of the table: ‘*Make sure it looks pretty*’; then they walked around the venue, personally inviting everyone to join. As we sat, the host took a group photo and started her introductory speech: ‘*We’ve got this tradition in Ziferblat... It roots back to Queen Victoria*’ [defensively addressing her assistant who continued arranging the snacks] *Hey, I’m trying to talk here!*’. After everyone froze and stopped drinking their tea, the host explicitly suggested a topic for discussion (to which I will get back in subsection 7.2.1) and made everyone speak in turns. When the event finished, one of the regulars told me: ‘*It’s all too sweet and cute now... It used to be much better—we’d all exchange*

caustic remarks, you know, this pseudo-English humour, like Jeeves and Wooster' (Yastrebov, interview, Pokrovka, December 2016). This episode illustrates how heterotopic aspirations of the local team, presumably attempting to reconstruct the atmosphere of an aristocratic salon or a gentlemen's club, affect Ziferblat's sociability—and not necessarily in a positive way.

In a similar vein, Mitin has made an attempt to restrict the use of board games in Ziferblat (apparently, unsuccessfully—by the time of my fieldwork, all four branches were equipped with plenty of games). Whereas other Moscow hosts raised the issue of noise associated with this activity (see, for example, Tanya's comment on p. 118), Mitin did not like the fact that board games *'do not let people make any progress'* (direct speech in: Mitin, 2012c). This attitude was echoed by Evan, an Old Street host (or, as he called himself, *'a social catalyst'*) who used to run an event called We Speak Freely—a regular get-together that did not use food as a social lubricant but relied entirely on his facilitation. As Sara, another Old Street host, recalled, *'This was all about showing up and talking. And if you've been talking to the same person for a while, then sometimes he would be like: 'Ok, everyone change and talk to someone who they haven't spoken to yet!'* (interview, August 2016). Just like Mitin, Evan found board games incompatible with the idea of Ziferblat:

People who are uncomfortable with the space will almost always go for a board game—it provides them with a structure to interact around. But crutches don't fix legs. If you pick up a board game as the first thing you do when you come in here, you're very unlikely to change anything in your life. In We Speak Freely, I banned all of those. We also modified Jenga²³³ by adding some questions, like 'What's your favourite colour', to encourage real [emphasis added—A.K.] interaction. (Interview, July 2016)

However, as follows from my ethnography and guests' accounts, board games do serve as a powerful community-building instrument—provided that the spatial structure of a certain branch allows for spontaneous sociability. In Pokrovka and Old Street, it is quite common for players to join or invite other guests if they need company, as the game situation legitimises contacts between strangers. Apart from that, one of the Old Street volunteers, Rick, runs a weekly board game night, which seems to be the most popular event in this branch. In our informal talk, Rick contested Evan's policy: *'In my experience, board games help people, especially those with social awkwardness, make connections'* (fieldnotes, March 2017).

As follows from this discrepancy between the conceived and the practised, Ziferblat's staff often demonstrate the same normative approach as that of social theorists

²³³ A game where players remove blocks from a tower and place them on top of it, trying to keep it stable.

criticised by Oosterman (1992) and Laurier (2005)—while drawing on strong assumptions about what makes ‘real’ or ‘true’ communication, they neglect the value of lighter forms of sociality.

7.1.5. Excited, addicted, exhausted: the outcomes of forced sociability

Whereas Moscow and London Ziferblats make special efforts to bring strangers together, the ZUKI team does not see this as a goal. As Ben, the CMO, explained, *‘One of the things that, I think, we’ve realised quite quickly, was—we weren’t gonna tell people “that’s a thing”, we weren’t gonna necessarily change how they were’* (interview, October 2016). In light of this, one might wonder whether this effort is worth it, or, in other words, what is the impact of this forced sociability on Ziferblat’s staff and guests.

On the one hand, throughout my research I have collected plenty of evidence of how Ziferblat improves people’s lives. Notably, while some participants discussed how they benefitted from Ziferblat’s mingling potential, making new friends and boosting their communication skills (the phrase *‘I used to be such a shy person before I came here’* was recurrent in staff and guests’ interviews), others highlighted the value of being a part of a ‘silent community’. The latter applies not only to Moscow and London branches but also to Edge Street—on different occasions, I have heard the story of Samantha, a 70-year-old regular, who recently lost her husband; she comes to Ziferblat to play the piano and be around people. Two guests interviewed in Tverskaya and Old Street emphasised that they have mental conditions for which Ziferblat works like a therapeutic space. Getting back to the idea of Ziferblat as a safe haven for people *‘deal[ing] with change’* (p. 110) and linking it to the research on how third places provide emotional support to elderly people coping with bereavement, divorce, separation, illness, retirement, and empty nest (Rosenbaum et al., 2007), migrants (Hall, 2009) and mothers dealing with social isolation on maternity leave (Henriksen et al., 2013), it can be said that the ethnography of Ziferblat both confirms and extends these findings. Apart from supporting the above-mentioned categories, Ziferblat works as the city’s ‘port of entry’ (Oldenburg, 2013: 15) for newcomers and temporary residents.

Whereas Oldenburg introduced the concept of ‘a port of entry’ only to lament the fact that single-use zoning deprived new residents of American suburbs from ‘a place on the corner’ (a tavern, a grocery, or a drugstore) where they could introduce themselves to their neighbours, I use it in a wider sense that has been touched upon in Tjora’s (2013) autoethnography on the sense of belonging experienced in a local cafe while on a trip. As his study revealed, even such subtle details as being recognised by the staff

(‘Early in today? Strong skinny latte?’) can make one who is temporarily disconnected from their social circle feel a strong attachment to a cafe: ‘having to leave Melbourne to go back to Norway after three weeks of daily visits in the cafe felt like leaving a group of friends’ (op. cit.: 119). In Ziferblat, this sense of belonging develops even faster and takes much stronger forms; in many interviews it was referred to as an ‘addiction’. Keeping in mind that ‘modern society is a society on the move’ (Lash and Urry, 1994: 252), my Ziferblat case study seems to indicate a societal need for more instantaneous forms of community and belonging than those provided by traditional third places.

However, one’s ability to use Ziferblat as a second home to a great extent relies on the hosts’ communicative and emotional labour. Although both concepts have been extensively used in the research on customer service, hospitality and catering industries (Bayard de Volo, 2003; Hill, 2015; Brophy, 2017), Ziferblat’s hosts often undertake even more demanding emotional tasks, comparable to those of social workers—while rarely, if ever (see the exception below) being trained as such:

I had a great experience where I asked a person at the door: ‘How are you?’—‘Yeah, yeah, I’m okay’, and then I met them in the kitchen again, I was, like, ‘I have to ask you this, you don’t seem okay...’, and they were [indistinct], they really shared. Because, I think, the first time you ask, people think, you just doing this... but if I ask again and... I was afraid to ask this question because it could be someone died, but I had to ask them because they seemed like they weren’t in a good place and I felt like it would be good if they just get it out. (Kevin, Old Street host, interview, September 2016)

Unsurprisingly, even those hosts who prefer to stick to a lighter mode of interaction with the guests, often experience burnout—this was a recurrent motif in staff interviews in London and both Moscow branches. A seasoned regular of Pokrovka, who nevertheless assertively distanced himself from the ‘Ziferblat crowd’ in our talk, shared some valuable observations in this regard:

New people are always so excited: ‘I love the place, I’m gonna work here for free!’, and then Ziferblat just sucks them dry emotionally. I’ve been observing it for years—it’s like a conveyor belt. They even look different in the end. One has to be very careful here... they even have this rule—don’t come here outside your shift. (Yastrebov, interview, December 2016)

Apart from this rule (or, as staff interviews suggest, rather a recommendation), aimed at setting work/life boundaries, Ziferblat’s staff benefit from the humans-before-employees ethics, discussed in subsection 4.3.4. Notably, branch managers in London and Moscow never push a host if they find themselves incapable of performing emotional labour on a specific shift; instead, they are supposed to delegate this responsibility to volunteers. To quote Sara, ‘I have three people that I can just go: “I’m having a hermit day, I just want to do all sort of behind-the-scenes errands, can you

come and volunteer and be super-friendly with the guests?” (Old Street host, interview, August 2016).

The quality of hosts' communicative labour has a strong impact on guests' emotional state. As follows from my observations, interviews and media analysis, the great level of anxiety and frustration among newcomers (*'Finally, I picked up the courage and walked in'*) stems not only from the ambiguity of Ziferblat's socio-spatial framework, as discussed in chapter 5, but also from the perceived idea of a 'sociable space', which, to many, adds to the pressures of communicative capitalism where everyone is expected to be an efficient networker (Dean, 2009; Hill, 2015; Brophy, 2017). Thus, many guests—some explicitly, others implicitly—referred to Ziferblat as a 'bring-your-own-friend' place that might be uncomfortable for a solo newcomer.

Finally, Ziferblat's forced sociability makes guests more vulnerable to each other than they are in public places with more rigid social etiquette, which raises the issue of emotional abuse and harassment. Although such situations are quite rare, they require strong mediation skills from staff. London team leader Alex, trained as a social worker, guides hosts to *'draw on the principle of sensitivity'* (interview, November 2016). The fragments below illustrate how Old Street staff navigate through problematic situations (note how Sara articulates and asserts the idea of safe space in this context):

There was a bipolar guy in here, he believed he was god and he talked about how he'd like to manipulate women, so that he could abuse them... I said: 'I'm gonna ask you to... out of care and consideration for people around you, because I'm feeling that you're talking over people a little bit and I'm getting the impression you're not fully considering other people's needs in space...' And it quickly became apparent that he wasn't actually able to understand his effect on other people and thus change his behaviour, so I had to ask him to leave. (Evan, interview, July 2016)

It's the host's job or responsibility to say: 'Hey, I know we advertise ourselves as a safe space but that goes both ways and if you're gonna say something that could be triggering for other people then that would make this space unsafe for them.' (Sara, interview, August 2016)

It's not about morality, it's caring about each other. I had to intervene the other day... two guests were telling everyone in the kitchen how cool it is to cycle, how it's anti-consumerist and environment-friendly, and I thought, what if someone who's making a sandwich right now cannot cycle because of some invisible disability—how would they feel hearing this? So, I stepped in and said, like, let's not forget that some people are less able to enjoy cycling. (Alex, op. cit. interview)

As these examples demonstrate, the discussion on sociability and community in Ziferblat is inseparable from the issues of social inclusion and diversity, which will be addressed in more details in the next section.

7.2. A space of hope: on the societal impact of Ziferblat

As mentioned in chapter 3, Ziferblat was conceived as an experimental space, or, shall we say, a social condenser producing sociability and community as a breeding ground for further developments in society, economy and politics. In what follows, I will critically interrogate this claim, looking at the issues of social inclusion and diversity, alternative economies and infra/proto/parapolitics in Ziferblat.

7.2.1. All-friendly? The issues of inclusion and diversity

As follows from the analysis, social inclusion and diversity in Ziferblat mainly depends on three interrelated factors: geographic, cultural and financial. Property location, as discussed in section 6.1, makes Ziferblat's clientele in Manchester more diverse than that of the London branch. Apart from that, Ziferblat's openness to some social groups and unavailability to others is largely affected by the wider cultural differences between Russia and the UK (or, perhaps, Moscow vs. London and Manchester) and the social/commercial dialectic of Ziferblat.

In addition to many examples of how the Moscow Ziferblats construct and reiterate the hegemony of the cultured, discussed in chapter 6, it should be noted that even such inclusive (in principle) community-building instruments as tea parties and shared meals, intended to celebrate the community of Ziferblat's guests, bringing together newcomers and regulars, 'common people' and 'intelligentsia', often lack sensitivity to cultural capital and social class inequalities:

Dinners here work better than that afternoon tea thing in Pokrovka, where they drink tea and the host asks everyone what was the last book they've read. It often feels awkward—they've read so many books since the last event and you're telling about a book you finished a month ago... (Viktor, Tverskaya guest, interview, March 2017)

Suren [an academic musician and composer, a local of both Pokrovka and Tverskaya, who volunteered to cook dinner that day—A.K.] acts like a host and leads the talk, bringing up the topic of music education; it turns out that one of the guests, Roman, went to a music college. Suren suddenly starts asking everyone in turns, 'Who is your favourite classical composer and why?'. It feels like some sort of a pop quiz. (Fieldnotes from Tverskaya, March 2017)

Despite attracting many unsettled teenagers and adults, looking for their place in the world, neither Pokrovka nor Tverskaya appeal to any marginalised groups in their external communication, whereas Old Street branch has a very explicit non-judgemental and gender-intelligent stance:

Come and hang out in this alcohol-free, open minded and friendly public living room—a Sanctuary in Shoreditch. Every person is welcome; this is an inclusive space that cares for and welcomes people of any body, gender, or

sexuality. We are committed to diversity, wholehearted acceptance and safety. (Ziferblat London, n.d.)

Not only does Old Street often hold events for LGBTQI+ communities ('Queer Make-up Workshop and Skillshare', 'Nothing's Binary: The Healing Power of Being Seen As We Truly Are', Pride Week celebration, to name a few), but it also turned its toilets, originally labelled as women's and men's, into gender-neutral ones, now differentiated as *'the one with the cubicles'* and *'the one with the urinals'*.²³⁴ When the Ziferblat Worldwide team found out about this queer-friendly policy, Old Street staff had to assert their position, drawing on the concept of home, and defend it against their Russia-based management. As Evan recalled,

They didn't really understand... but that's ok. Again, we fight for our right to claim what the needs of the people here are,²³⁵ if someone were to turn around and say: 'Where will the normal people go?', I'd say, well, you probably need to stop working out of a mindset of segregation and separation and start seeing people as people. If you wanna make a home here, it better bloody well include the LGBTQ community, otherwise what kind of home is that? (Interview, July 2016)

When I double-checked this with Alex, the branch manager, they²³⁶ confirmed that this conversation did happen and explained how they responded to it, highlighting the impact of the 'super-diverse' (Vertovec, 2007; Hall, 2015) character of London on Ziferblat:

I've been an LGBT activist my whole life, so I'm very much aware of the importance of inclusivity and intersectionality. Moscow lives under different legislation,²³⁷ but we are in London. (...) there's more freedom here, and there's more awareness of how different communities interact and what they need to feel safe.²³⁸ I see Ziferblat as an inclusive space where people come from different cultures, different backgrounds, different experiences. (...) If you are to make a safe, open place where people communicate, it's the basics. This is what I said to them. (...) Another thing is, many establishments say that they are all-friendly, LGBT-inclusive, they put a rainbow sticker on their door (...). But the question is, what are you really doing to make them feel comfortable, feel equal, feel that they have the right to this space as much as everyone else does? This is why we choose to host such events. (Interview, November 2016)

²³⁴ Ziferblat shares these toilets with at least one more office located in the same building, so this initiative went beyond the venue's physical borders and was supported by its neighbours.

²³⁵ Meaning the playlist independence (see p. 181).

²³⁶ Participant's preferred pronoun.

²³⁷ Russian federal law called 'For the Purpose of Protecting Children from Information Advocating for a Denial of Traditional Family Values' (2013) prohibits 'propaganda of non-traditional sexual relationships', which includes materials 'raising interest in such relationships', causing minors to 'form non-traditional sexual predispositions', or 'presenting distorted ideas about the equal social value of traditional and non-traditional sexual relationships'.

²³⁸ Notably, Alex, a Belarus-born person whose native language is Russian, had to switch to English when using the rhetoric of inclusion and sensitivity in this and other fragments of their interview.

Further, as Alex and other staff members repeatedly stressed in their interviews, the fact that the Old Street branch does not have disabled access (it is a first floor property without a lift) undermines the whole idea of a safe haven; as Sara put it, *'That's not in line with our values'* (interview, August 2016).²³⁹ To this can be added that the very fact that Mitin, despite having spent so much time on choosing the best location for Ziferblat in London, neglected this aspect when opting for that property, is yet another example of the cultural differences between Russia and the UK in terms of sensitivity to social exclusion in third places.²⁴⁰

In Edge Street, the idea of accessibility and diversity is arguably realised to the fullest possible extent, albeit being profit- rather than ideology-driven. As mentioned in previous chapters, it is always phrased by the local team as an intention to attract as many demographics as possible, and make all of them feel comfortable in the same space. Comfort is probably the key word here: unlike Old Street, emphasising the value of acceptance and being in a safe space, Edge Street rather appeals to the value of convenience, or, more precisely, convenience for everyone. All ZUKI branches, including this one, have disabled access and baby-changing facilities;²⁴¹ this policy also affects the food offer in Edge Street, as it includes vegan, gluten-free and kosher options. Although the local team does not focus on any marginalised groups in particular, it does acknowledge their presence and needs and makes certain efforts to increase the overall inclusivity of this place. Thus, it added the rainbow filter to the panoramic photo of the venue on Manchester Pride's Big Weekend in August 2016 and, among some other Manchester public places, joined the city council's 'Breastfeeding-Friendly' scheme in 2017. Despite the fact that Edge Street hosts, primarily due to the venue size, do not introduce newcomers to other guests as often happens in Old Street, visitors with disabilities are treated with extra care:

There is a blind lady that comes in all the time and Henry [a host—A.K.] will lead her around, grab her a cup of tea, make sure she's all comfortable and she's with people... he will go and chat to her and things like that. (Tracey, branch manager, interview, November 2016)

One of the guests, after confessing that Edge Street is her favourite public place in Manchester, explained that she likes it not only because it feels *'homely and relaxed'*

²³⁹ This, along with the landlord's intention to double the rent as soon as the current lease expires, is the reason why the Old Street team is going to move to another venue in 2019.

²⁴⁰ There is no disabled access in Moscow Ziferblats either—as well as in the vast majority of public places in Russia.

²⁴¹ Guests with little children are welcome in all Ziferblats but neither Old Street nor Pokrovka, nor even Tverskaya (which has a highchair available on demand) has baby-changing facilities. In London, it is because of an extremely cramped bathroom coming with the property chosen by Mitin, whereas in Moscow, it is still very rare for public places (unless specifically labelled as 'family-friendly') to have such facilities at all (which, again, explains why their absence did not prevent Mitin from choosing this property).

but also because *'it's so inclusive and diverse'*, and even noncustomers—in this specific instance, coming from a vulnerable and disadvantaged group—get all possible assistance from the staff:

Staff members are really nice and helpful. Like today, somebody came in here who can't speak English and they were looking for a refugee service that used to be in this building,²⁴² and they were trying really hard to help this lady. And I was just like, 'Oh, it's so nice.' (Harper, interview, Edge Street, March 2017)

Keeping in mind Alex's comment on the fact that more and more venues nowadays call themselves *'all-friendly'*, one cannot help but question whether this attitude has limits. On the one hand, inclusion and diversity are indeed often reduced to the buzz words exploited by contemporary commercial cultures and the rhetoric of urban boosterism (Brooks, 2000; Florida, 2005; Harvey, 2008; Zukin, 2010; Bereitschaft, 2017). The discrepancy between how Mitin kept in mind some sort of a folk version of Florida's *'gay index'* when looking for a property in London (see p. 166) and how the Russian team reacted to the LGBTQI+ inclusion in Old Street is, perhaps, the most vivid illustration of this phenomenon. On the other hand, third places operating as commercial enterprises, no matter how convivial they are, inevitably exclude *'many of those most in need'* (Iveson and Fincher, 2011: 869). It would, of course, be an exaggeration to say that Edge Street discriminates against students—as mentioned in subsection 6.1.3, this branch offers them a significant discount. Nevertheless, it is remarkable how the avoidance of the *'student stigma'* in Edge Street positioning attracts not just a wider but, arguably, a more affluent audience—young professionals, freelancers of all ages and families using the main space, and small to large enterprises renting out the meeting rooms for private purposes. But what about the most marginalised ones?

One of the most striking findings from the analysis of media representations was the fact that almost each and every publication on Ziferblat, regardless of the country, got at least one comment about homeless people. The allegedly unlimited access to food, framed by media and perceived by internet commenters as the possibility of gorging, provoked an interesting spectrum of reactions which can be best summarised in the following two quotes from the readers' comments under two different news articles

²⁴² The previous tenant of that property, now occupied by ZUKI, was indeed a refugee support centre—the Manchester branch of the organisation called *Refugee Action*. In late 2014, just before Ziferblat moved in, Refugee Action moved to Hulme, an inner city area immediately south of Manchester city centre. Given the scale and extent of gentrification in this district, it is not unlikely that Refugee Action simply could not afford the increased rent price in Edge Street, which provides a more problematic perspective on the issues of diversity and inclusion in the creative city.

about the opening of Ziferblat in London, published on the same day in The Guardian and the Daily Mail, respectively:

I will happily give any homeless person I see outside this place 30p for 10 minutes to get a hot drink, a snack and use the loo. I suspect there is a catch. (See comments in: Baker 2014)

I wouldn't go to one of those places. It would be likely filled with homeless people. (See comments in: Keeley 2014)

While the Guardian's reader uses the 'homeless person argument' to test the limits of Ziferblat's hospitality, the Daily Mail's commenter demonstrates what Lofland (1998: 153) called 'the fear of outcasts'. It is no coincidence that the latter perspective dominated among Russian internet commenters, as well as staff and guests of Pokrovka and Tverskaya:

We often get some unpleasant people dropping in here, especially on Friday and Saturday nights... This street is not the most quiet place. It's just wild. Bums²⁴³ are hanging out around. (Nikita, Pokrovka host, interview, July 2016)

A lady called and asked whether she can bring her kid with her. 'Sure you can', I said. 'But there is no real food there, right?'—'Unfortunately no, but you can bring your own food or order delivery from elsewhere. We have coffee and some sweets, it's all good.' And then she goes, 'I hope there are no bums there?' I was so shocked! Why would she think so? I laughed and replied, 'Of course no, please feel free to come in.' (Boris, Tverskaya host, interview, July 2016)

As is the case with many other controversial statements coming from the Russian teams and guests, these quotes illustrate the current state of the urban public space discourse in Russia rather than one's personal insensitivity to social exclusion.

Contrastingly, neither of UK Ziferblats discriminates against homeless and financially struggling people, though not without certain limitations. In 2016, Old Street introduced a new pricing system called 'Zifer-Revolution', aimed to make the space more affordable for a wider range of visitors. It also included the so-called 'community scheme', which involved gathering donations from solvent customers to give free access to those who cannot afford to pay (examples that hosts gave in their interviews included recent graduates, unemployed people, freelancers between jobs) and even arranging special events for such groups, completely free of charge. However, after a

²⁴³ Nikita, as well as his colleague Boris, cited in the next fragment, used the Russian word *bomzhi* (plural for *bomzh*), originating from the abbreviation *Bez Opredellionnogo Mesta Zhitelstva* ('without a permanent place to live'), initially used as an official term by the Soviet authorities and turned into a derogatory yet very common slang word in the post-Soviet period. Since the early 2000s, and especially during the past decade, Russian social activists and charity organisations have been making efforts to destigmatise homeless people and improve their condition, also suggesting to use a much less dehumanising word *bezdomnyie* (literally 'the homeless') in public and private speech.

few months, this pricing system was rejected as financially unfeasible. In their interviews, Old Street hosts, following the principles of non-judgemental communication, did not explicitly distinguish homeless and otherwise disadvantaged people among the rest of their customers, though there were some indications of their time-to-time presence among the clientele:

We had one person coming at one point, he was obviously in a difficult part of his life and asked me if he could just come in on donation, and even tried to donate jewellery because he didn't have anything else, and I'm like: 'Please, don't, you can just come on in...' (Sara, interview, August 2016)

Given the scarcity of the food offer in this branch, such guests seem to come to Old Street primarily in search of emotional support, whereas in Edge Street, they often drop by only to have a quick meal. Considering the middle-class appearance of this venue, one can only guess how it feels to be the Other in such an environment, but even if they wanted to linger, the Edge Street pricing system would give them very little chance to do so. Nevertheless, staff members treat them as any other group of customers, as long as they do not violate Ziferblat's rules:

We certainly wouldn't ban certain groups of people. It doesn't matter who you are. You know, we've regularly had a group of individuals who... you know, they don't have a home of their own, and they often come in here for a cup of tea and a biscuit, and they leave a certain amount of money at reception, and they say: 'Can you let me know when I've reached that'. And, you know, we wouldn't turn individuals like that away. Why would we? (Gareth, ZUKI COO, interview, Edge Street, October 2016)

In addition, according to the branch manager, Edge Street is regularly visited by another, also often stigmatised, group of people—'the city's pamphleteers and trestle-table evangelists' (Rhys-Taylor, 2017: 115), '*stopping off every morning to grab a quick breakfast before they have to stand up on the street all day*' (Tracey, interview, November 2016).

If one is to critically interrogate the extent of diversity and inclusivity in Ziferblat even further, the question should be: with all the above in mind, does this space provide its core clientele—young creative types—with the possibility of a non-blasé encounter with the less and least advantaged ones? In Edge Street, due to the pricing system, forcing such groups to reduce their experience of Ziferblat to a quick meal, they are an easy target for judgement and hostility from the other, more affluent customers. That said, I am aware of only one situation of this kind, which will be discussed in subsection 7.2.3; looking ahead, it must be noted that the aggressor did not belong to the core group of Ziferblat's audience. Pokrovka and Tverskaya are more affordable but much less inclusive, whereas Old Street has the best balance between these two characteristics; its ideology and physical layout are two other factors making this branch the most

conducive to meaningful encounters, such as this one, mentioned in a private status update posted by one of the hosts, Francesca, in her Facebook account:²⁴⁴

Spent last night at Ziferblat London talking to this lovely guy, a friend of a friend, who also happens to be a Syrian refugee, and he shared his story with us. What it was like to be there during the war and how he made it to Europe and eventually the UK, where he is still struggling to find a decent accommodation and a job. And he seems to have maintained a positive attitude. Things like this remind me that I couldn't be more grateful for my part-time job. (January 2017)

On the other hand, even though all four Ziferblats provide space to non-profit organisations tutoring refugee children (in Moscow) and supporting homeless people, recovering addicts, and people with mental health issues (in London and Manchester), most of them—due to the sensitivity of the subjects discussed—are held in private or secluded areas, separated from the main bulk of customers.

In 2012, Pokrovka and Tverskaya hosted a series of Human Library events, which could be classified as what I earlier called special interactive frameworks. This global non-profit movement, originating from Denmark, provides participants with a 'living book', i.e. a real person representing a stigmatised group, which can be 'borrowed' for a 30-45 minute interpersonal conversation aimed to 'challenge stereotypes and prejudices through dialogue' (Human Library, n.d.). In Moscow Ziferblats, people were offered the following books: a refugee, twins, a Dagestani man, a journalist, a Hare Krishna devotee, a Romani woman, an ex-drug addict, a gay man, a Jewish woman, a Muslim woman, a solo traveller, a transsexual, a chemistry scientist, a feminist, a vegan, an HIV-positive person, a lesbian, a police officer, a Buddhist, and an adoptive mother. This initiative, albeit being sometimes criticised for limited societal impact and the risk of dehumanising people volunteering as books, is internationally recognised as an efficient instrument of individual attitudinal change (Dreher and Mowbray, 2012). However, in 2012 these events moved from Ziferblat to Moscow's renovated libraries and cultural centres, accessible at no cost to everyone.

It would hardly be fair to expect places like Ziferblat to accommodate all social groups—simply because their commercial nature inevitably leads to social exclusion, at the very least on financial grounds. Nevertheless, there seems to be at least one significant achievement: all four Ziferblats, even the most expensive Edge Street, provide space to the most precarious and disadvantaged layer of the creative class—unemployed graduates, people between jobs, struggling freelancers, small start-ups. Despite not being recognised as marginalised groups, they are in many regards

²⁴⁴ I saw this post, as Francesca and I are friends on Facebook; it is cited here with her kind permission obtained in personal communication (15 May 2018).

excluded from the neoliberal city, either pushed into cafes or locked in their homes, left to deal with the financial and emotional issues that never come up in the celebratory rhetoric romanticising the 'coolness' of digital nomadism (Gandini, 2015).

7.2.2. Alternative economies, traditional dilemmas

As a Czech enthusiast, who once tried to raise funds (unsuccessfully) to open a Ziferblat in Prague, summarised in his pitch, *'Ziferblat is a representative of a modern concept of social business'* (Indiegogo, 2016). On the one hand, all four branches indeed support various charities and local businesses and communities and/or engage in recycling. Pokrovka collaborates with the Special Ceramics craft studio where people with mental health issues make pottery for sale;²⁴⁵ in 2013, the team helped an environmental activist to raise money for the local historical garden restoration project; on International Women's Day 2017, 20% of the day's revenue was donated to the rape crisis centre. Tverskaya, for its part, used to provide space for the Refugee Children Integration Centre's tutorials. Both Moscow Ziferblats collect batteries, light bulbs, paper and cardboard waste—not only their own but also that brought by their guests—and pass it on to recycling companies, which, given the current state of the recycling legislation in Russia, requires great effort and determination.²⁴⁶

As mentioned above, Old Street and Edge Street host public and private events organised by various charities; the former branch also collaborates with their Shoreditch neighbour, *Restoration Station*—a non-profit furniture workshop run by an addiction recovery charity.²⁴⁷ Both branches also use locally roasted fair trade coffee. While Old Street does not specifically advertise this fact, Edge Street often mentions it in their external communication as evidence of their ethical and sustainable approach to business (Burns, 2016; ZUKI, 2016a), which raises an issue akin to that discussed above in relation to the commodification of the rhetoric of diversity and inclusion. As Peter Luetchford shows in his study on local food and Fair Trade movements, ethical consumption practices often get appropriated and diluted by market and monetary value and come to reproduce the mainstream (Luetchford, 2016: 388). As with being

²⁴⁵ Special Ceramics mugs are displayed right next to the alarm clocks, so everyone entering the venue has a chance to see and purchase them. Unlike other initiatives, this is a long-term collaboration project.

²⁴⁶ According to Nikita, Pokrovka host, this branch consumes about 20-30 milk tetra packs per day. As most waste removal and recycling services are not interested in collecting such a small amount of refuse, staff used to bring their recycling to one of such companies by foot once a month, making multiple journeys with heavy bags, until they found a startup entrepreneur who collects recycling from individuals and small businesses (interview, July 2016). Notably, as long as Pokrovka and Tverskaya operate under a library rather than cafe licence, Russian legislation does not apply any special requirements to their waste removal, so their efforts are purely driven by environmental concern.

²⁴⁷ *'We exchange work tools, we come visit each other. They donated this sofa to us, fixed that lamp over there... they also gave a couple of workshops on furniture restoration to our guests'* (Alex, Old Street branch manager, interview, November 2017).

‘all-friendly’, even the sincerest attempts to make the world a better place sometimes look like a box-ticking exercise ensuring that one’s business appeals to the target demographic. Thus, as the Shenton Group’s website explicitly says, introducing Ziferblat among their other hospitality businesses (a boutique hostel chain and a shared housing company),

As the hospitality sector grows and becomes more sophisticated and with an ever more educated customer demanding greater value, quality and authenticity, Shenton has created and launched a range of businesses which directly anticipate the lifestyle needs of the millennial generation. (Shenton Group, 2016)

Contrary to this calculated vision, Moscow Ziferblats’ approach to alternative economies at times seems to lack consistency. In one of my fieldtrips to Moscow (July 2016), my friend Ira, a cultural activist and contemporary artist renting a room five minutes walking distance from Ziferblat in Pokrovka, was eager to tell me about the latest talk of the town—cooperative cafes and bars, ‘*truly committed to the Marxist principles of fair labour*’, as she said. One of them, a coffeeshop called *Kooperativ ‘Chernyi’* (‘The Black Cooperative’),²⁴⁸ I had already known from my background research on the ‘urbanism boom’ in Russia. This company, founded in 2013 by four philosophy students and located on Pokrovka just a few blocks from Ziferblat, was the first Moscow coffeeshop working on principles of conscious consumption, fair trade and non-hierarchy (Zhavoronkova, 2016). Just a couple of days after my talk with Ira, I had an interview with Nikita, a Pokrovka host, accompanied by some comments from his friend Artem, known as a local in both Moscow Ziferblats. When I asked them which places in Moscow they find akin to Ziferblat, *Kooperativ ‘Chernyi’* was brought up again. Keeping in mind that the Pokrovka branch also turned to a non-hierarchy system in 2015 (earlier in that interview, Nikita spoke very enthusiastically about this change), I decided that *Kooperativ ‘Chernyi’* was mentioned because of its ideological kinship with Ziferblat, but, as it turned out, my interpretation was wrong:

Nikita: (...) Kooperativ ‘Chernyi’, Sosna i Lipa...²⁴⁹

Artem: Right, these two.

A.K.: Is it because they have similar organisational principles?

Nikita: Mmm... we just used to hang out there.

A.K.: Ah, right. You know, their organisational structure seems very similar to yours—they also share responsibility and profit equally, there is no hierarchy, just like here.

²⁴⁸ This name derives from ‘black coffee’.

²⁴⁹ An independent craft beer bar on Pokrovka.

Nikita: No, we didn't discuss such things with them, we would just drop by once in a while. It's rather DIC,²⁵⁰ we would go to DIC more often, because our friend S. was the manager there.

Artem [to Nikita]: Wow, S. was the manager there? Awesome.

(Interview, Pokrovka, July 2016)

This episode illustrates not only the issue of cliquishness in Russian placemaking initiatives of the late 2000s–early 2010s (see p. 70), but also what Faubion (2008: 38) called ‘the reduction of the ethical to the aesthetic’. Although Nikita was very excited about the new non-hierarchy system in Ziferblat, my comment about a similar initiative in what he and Artem considered a cool hangout spot did not seem to interest them in the slightest. Later in that interview we had a similar exchange about the tall glass bottle where Pokrovka staff keep dishwashing liquid—it took me a while to identify this object the first time I was washing up, as there was no label and it was not particularly handy to use without a dispenser. Surprised with such a choice, I assumed that the local team, known for their recycling initiatives, did not want to keep any plastic items on display for ethical reasons, but, as Nikita explained (in his turn, noticeably surprised with my interpretation), there was no environmental thinking behind that bottle: *‘It just looks prettier [than the plastic one]’*. Another example is how Tverskaya team curates their mini swap shop, envisioning it as a display of Ziferblat’s aesthetic and a trendy must-have rather than an instrument of environmental and social change (see Appendix G, paragraph 18).

In a similar way, the ZUKI team persistently links Ziferblat to the concept of the sharing economy (Ben’s direct quote in: Willis, 2016), sometimes specifying it as ‘the sharing economy of space’ (Ben’s direct quote in: BusinessCloud, 2016) or referring to Airbnb and Uber as phenomena akin to Ziferblat (interviews with Ben and Gareth, September and October 2016). However, given how little opportunity for cooperation and participation this branch provides, it is not entirely clear what exactly is being shared there and by whom. Speaking of the idea of Ziferblat more generally, the way in which this social experiment commodifies sociability, community and the sense of belonging raises even more difficult questions.

In guests’ interviews, their reflections on Ziferblat’s economy rarely went further than just acknowledging the liberation from the pressure to purchase drinks and food when they need an extension of home, a third place or a workstation. Two rare exceptions—both coming from Old Street—included Bryan and Heather (see their discussion of the sharing economy and participatory culture in Ziferblat on p.131–132) and Magda, a 72-

²⁵⁰ A small creative cluster to which Kooperativ ‘Chernyi’ used to belong in 2014; it was located 20 minutes walking distance from Ziferblat.

year-old translator and writer, who shared with me her impressions straight after her first visit. It took her only 30-40 minutes (without even talking to staff) to fully embrace the idea that Mitin and his London colleagues aspired to promote:

It kind of moves away from all this capitalist nonsense. I don't even know if there is some political thinking behind it... do you know? I've been looking to find a place like this, to run one myself with a few friends... a place a bit like a cafe but not really a cafe... a bit like a gallery at the same time... where some gigs could be played, some poetry readings, on a non-commercial basis. But to have a place, you need money, you need to either buy it or rent it. It's kind of a dream. So, when I see something like this, all that I have in mind comes alive and becomes more possible. (Interview, Old Street, February 2017)

Magda's vision of Ziferblat sounds like a response to the call of critical urban theory for spaces of hope and possibility (Lefebvre, [1968] 1996; Harvey, 2000; Marcuse, 2009). But what is the answer to her question regarding the political ideas (if any) behind Ziferblat?

7.2.3. Proto, infra, para: the political in Ziferblat

The fluid concept of proto-/infra-/para-political space coined by De Cauter and Dehaene seems to be the best description of Ziferblat's political stance, be it Russian or UK branches. Unlike with post-political rhetoric (Mouffe, 2005), Ziferblat staff and guests are very well aware of ongoing political struggles, antagonisms and oppressions. Nevertheless, all four teams unanimously stick to the 'no politics' rule, which, as follows from my research, breaks down into two principles. First, Ziferblat does not support any political parties:

We are trying to stay away from politics. This is not to say that no one can come here and organise something... I mean, we don't announce that, for instance, today we have social-democrats. They can gather here if they want. There was even a pretty nasty situation in some city... some nationalists were hanging out in their local Ziferblat... didn't really attack anyone but anyway... and they also posted some photos. But it wasn't an announced event, so, of course, it was not cool but they have their right to gather there, like everyone else. We only try to make sure that it is not advertised. If they had asked whether they could do it, we would have said 'No'. Obviously. (Gleb, Ziferblat Worldwide's CTO, interview, July 2016)

This attitude only partially stems from Mitin's culturally specific attitude towards politics, discussed in chapter 3. In Old Street, I had a similar response from Sara, a host, who said that she personally would not want 'Labour or Tory or Green or any other party to have any kind of event and talk to the public here' unless they 'hire out the space and completely shut it down, so it isn't advertised or associated with us' (interview, August 2016). As the cross-cultural comparison suggests, this unwillingness to be 'contaminated' with the (party) political is largely driven by the fundamental heterotopic

motif of purification that underpins the metaphor of sanctuary (Foucault, [1967] 2008: 21).

Second, Ziferblat does not welcome those guests or event organisers whose desire to espouse political views might be uncomfortable or triggering for others, which brings us back to the idea of safe space. As Tracey, the Edge Street branch manager, elaborated in response to my question *‘What sort of event you would not host in Ziferblat?’*,

Anything unethical. I’m totally for this being an ethical branch and I would never have anything that would offend anybody. That’s the only basis. So, the Cake & Doodle group²⁵¹ are putting on an exhibition of their art work, and the organiser said, ‘Is there any sort of boundaries that you wouldn’t like me to cross?’, so, I just said, ‘Let’s steer away from politics and anything that might offend people’. The whole idea is that we are really pro-everyone... [A few minutes later, answering my question about what sort of behaviour would be considered inappropriate in Ziferblat—A.K.] People of strange, outlier views that are disrespectful to other people. I don’t like that sort of thing in here. Nothing political, stay away from politics. (Interview, November 2016)

That said, upon a closer look it becomes apparent that the political inevitably passes through the ‘no politics’ filter, manifesting itself in Russian and UK Ziferblats in many direct and indirect forms.

First, during the 2011–2012 Russian protests, the Pokrovka branch hosted a few events with an explicitly political agenda²⁵² and, as mentioned in chapter 3, supported the Occupy Abai protest camp. Remarkably, in his media interviews Mitin described these events as spur-of-the-moment rather than thoroughly planned (Gurova, 2012; Vylegzhanin, 2012). In a similar way, Old Street organised an emergency solidarity gathering on the day after the Brexit referendum, and a spontaneous queer solidarity night after the mass shooting in Orlando, US in 2016.

Second, contrary to how De Cauter and Dehaene (2008: 90–91) isolate the political and the economic from the cultural in their theory of heterotopia, the latter sometimes mediates the former in Ziferblat. The examples include Evgeny Feldman’s²⁵³ public talk in Pokrovka on his photographic coverage of the 2016 US presidential election, a Plato reading group in Pokrovka (*‘We criticised the state and the government, it was such a*

²⁵¹ Manchester’s graphic artists meet-up, regularly taking place in Ziferblat.

²⁵² E.g. a public talk by Alexei Navalny (the leader of Russian opposition) and the screening of the documentary about Mikhail Khodorkovsky (Russian ex-oligarch who spent ten years in prison, being declared a ‘prisoner of conscience’ by Amnesty International and a ‘personal enemy of Putin’ by Russian and international media).

²⁵³ Russian photojournalist and political photographer, mostly working for opposition media.

revolutionary vibe!'),²⁵⁴ and Old Street's leftist and feminist art events and exhibitions.²⁵⁵

Third, throughout my ethnography I have heard many casual conversations between staff and/or guests concerning current political issues, both in Russian and UK Ziferblats:

A local addresses a host: 'Have you heard that Putin signed Yarovaya's bill'²⁵⁶ into law?' They discuss this for a while, then move to more general reflections on Russian politics: 'Russian history goes in a circle... Those liberals... I bet they will become tyrants as soon as they take power.' (Fieldnotes from Pokrovka, July 2016)

A new guest starts chatting with two hosts; their conversation begins with small talk about cigarettes and coffee and somehow immediately jumps to the US Democracy Spring and its coverage in media. It quickly starts heating up (emotional and loud but still friendly); they bring up existentialism, personal freedom, communism, leftists, racism... Sounds like a political study group. (Fieldnotes from Old Street, April 2016)

Although it would be a great exaggeration to say that such themes feature largely in Ziferblat's communication landscape, I found it notable that both staff and guests seemed to feel safe about discussing such sensitive topics in a public place, while being surrounded by complete strangers. As one of the interviews indicated, not everyone is sympathetic to such discussions. A seasoned regular of Pokrovka, Yastrebov, expressed irritation about some politically active members of the Ziferblat community:

There are a lot of liberasts'²⁵⁷ hanging out here... you know, those blokes who are against the government... strong navalnists',²⁵⁸ always willing to discuss stuff... [giggles] I find them ridiculous. Are they blind or what? Moscow has changed so much in the last five years,²⁵⁹ but some people are still discontented. Strange, no? I'm totally contented. (Interview, Pokrovka, December 2016)

Furthermore, sometimes the political quite literally invades Ziferblat, challenging the anti-political stance of the inhabitants of this safe haven. One of the examples was shared by Tracey from Edge Street. Soon after the UK EU membership referendum, she was approached by a guest, who, outraged by the fact that Ziferblat lets homeless

²⁵⁴ Roman, Pokrovka guest, interview, December 2016.

²⁵⁵ E.g. *Shatterproof: LGBTQI+ and Women's Performance Evening* (a fundraiser for a charity supporting young LGBT people); *Pen vs. Bullet: A Discussion and Creative Session* (organised by the Global Arts and Politics Alliance).

²⁵⁶ A project of legislation introduced by a Russian conservative politician Irina Yarovaya; it required telecom operators to store recordings of phone conversations, text messages and users' internet traffic up to 6 months.

²⁵⁷ Russian political slur ('liberal' + 'pederast') used by the supporters of Putin to offend a person of opposite views (not necessarily liberal or libertarian).

²⁵⁸ Navalny's supporters.

²⁵⁹ Meaning the achievements of the 'hipster urbanism', discussed in chapter 3.

people use the space, attempted to lecture her on how *'those who claim benefits should be shipped off elsewhere'* and how *'Brexit will finally put an end to this nonsense'*; in response, Tracey asserted her own and her team's political orientation, saying to him: *'We are not pros [not pro-Brexit—A.K.] here'* (interview, November 2016).

Another example was perhaps the most insightful and emotionally charged moment of my whole fieldwork. On the penultimate day of my field trip to Moscow in March 2017, I came out of the subway, intending to quickly cross Pushkinskaya Square to get to Ziferblat Tverskaya, but instead found myself in the middle of the largest anti-government rally since 2011, organised by Navalny and his supporters (Walker and Luhn, 2017). Thousands of protesters—mostly young people in their twenties and teenagers—were literally standing shoulder to shoulder as all exits from the square and the adjoining street were blocked by police. Slowly moving towards Ziferblat (which took me about an hour, as opposed to the usual five minutes) and listening to the talks and chants around, I could not help but snicker at myself. Four years ago, I was planning to undertake a study on the rise of the 'city of citizens', struggling against the 'city of authority' in Russia (see p. 37), but after the massive crackdown on the protests and further attacks on civil rights and liberties I lost my optimism and focused on anti-cafes, deep down considering this theme a refuge from the political. Now, in 2017, the political came to Ziferblat's door. When I finally reached the porch of Tverskaya branch, I noticed one of the hosts who went outside to see what was happening—he looked as dazed and confused as myself. In Ziferblat, everyone was talking about the rally: some guests were excitedly sharing their stories of getting there through the crowd, others were arguing (*'But it won't change anything!'*—*'So what, we're supposed to just sit still and do nothing?!'*), yet others were just silently watching the rally from the balcony looking at Tverskaya. In my fieldnotes on that day I wrote,

There was no difference between the protest crowd and the Ziferblat crowd—same faces and looks, same topics and jokes, well-mannered speech, subtle humour. I wonder how many of those students and school kids protesting outside were raised by Ziferblat?

It is quite difficult to tell whether there are any forces emerging in the experimental proto-/infra-/para-political space of Ziferblat and waiting to 'break ground in the full daylight of the space of appearance' (De Cauter and Dehaene, 2008: 100), or, in other words, whether the 'tiny publics' (Fine and Harrington, 2004) inhabiting Ziferblat can move from the civic toward the political end of the public spheres continuum and be mobilised for collective actions (Breese, 2008). It is remarkable, though, how Ziferblat is often perceived as the other of the existing socio-political order—even when it comes to contexts that have little to do with politics. For instance, when Alymkulova was

invited on a radio show among other representatives of Russian third places to discuss the new trends in leisure culture, all they were talking about was how people use anti-cafes for socialising and how this whole movement was influenced by digital culture with its '*horizontal connections*'. The host of this show, apparently very excited with what she heard, concluded: '*Sounds like we are in a different country*' (Troyanskaya, 2017). Or in a heterotopia, I would add.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the construction of sociability and community in Ziferblat and interrogated the possibility of social change that is expected to result from this placemaking project.

As follows from the case study of Ziferblat, merely putting people together into a public place does not itself guarantee that they will break their private bubbles to make new social ties. In fact, there is a range of socio-spatial factors producing conviviality in anti-cafes—physical design, hosts' communicative labour, and special interactive frameworks—but none of them alone is decisive, since they are interwoven and interdependent. Although the ZUKI team tends to explain the lack of sociability in Edge Street by British mentality, the example of London disproves this hypothesis. This observation expands the findings of Tjora's (2013) comparative research on communal processes in cafes, suggesting that sociability in contemporary public places (at least in the Global North urban context) is much more influenced by their socio-spatial characteristics than by the cultural differences between cities and countries.

The analysis of these characteristics challenges the assumption that internet and digital devices necessarily disrupt face-to-face interaction in a public place. On the other hand, some Ziferblat team members demonstrate strong expectations regarding how people should communicate in the space, while a silent community perspective is often neglected. Moreover, Ziferblat's forced sociability has mixed outcomes for staff and guests. While creating a strong sense of belonging for both and even serving as a therapeutic space for certain mental conditions, it often results in emotional burnout for the former and anxiety and frustration for the latter.

Whereas cultural differences do not seem to have a strong impact on Ziferblat's conviviality per se, they do affect the level of social inclusion and diversity. Other factors include geographic location and the balance between the social and the commercial in a particular branch. Alternative economies, in turn, feature prominently in Ziferblat's culture, though their implementation at times poses the question of whether this is really an attempt to provide an alternative to traditional capitalist forms

or just picking up some 'hot trends' without much (or, conversely, with too much) consideration. However, for some guests Ziferblat does serve as a space of hope, promising the possibility of social change—not only in the economy, but also in politics. Although in its everyday life Ziferblat, irrespective of the branch, tries to distance itself from the political, at moments of crisis it reveals its infra/proto/parapolitical essence.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has presented the results of the first in-depth sociological examination of the anti-cafe—a new form of public place invented in 2011 in Russia and in just a couple of years adopted worldwide. Charging by the minute and providing visitors with free wifi, refreshments and access to kitchen facilities, anti-cafes are designed to accommodate various social, cultural, home-from-home and work activities. Although most anti-cafe owners use this term with reservations, stressing that they are not trying to rebel against cafes or compete with them, this new form was born out of the desire to rethink the norms of the existing cafe culture. While drawing on the historical role of the cafe as a social and cultural centre, temporary workspace, home from home and, overall, the most flexible and inclusive form of public place, anti-cafes shifted the balance from food consumption to non food-related activities, traditionally considered a supplementary rather than primary function of cafes, and introduced an unprecedented level of self-service. However, upon a closer look, anti-cafes appear to be a much more complex phenomenon—both functionally and ideologically—than just another iteration of the cafe. At its core, this thesis argues that the emergence and quick expansion of the anti-cafe indicates some important social and cultural shifts in the idea of public place, work, home, leisure, consumption and social interaction.

To unpack this phenomenon, I focused on Ziferblat, the world's first and largest anti-cafe chain, traced its history through media research and interviews, and ethnographically explored its everyday routines in four venues located in Moscow, London and Manchester. The analysis, guided by an inductive strategy, revealed an overarching theme of placemaking, which shifted my conceptual lens from the 'whatness' of the anti-cafe to the process of making a new form of public place and thereby expanded the theoretical contribution of this thesis. Thus, apart from providing an insight into a previously unexplored phenomenon of anti-cafes, this research advances the growing literature on placemaking, largely dominated by a normative and instrumental 'toolkit' approach, by offering a more critical and theoretically informed perspective, bringing into focus the issues of power and representation. Drawing on the critical spatial theories of Henry Lefebvre, Michel Foucault, Sharon Zukin, Doreen Massey, and Kim Dovey, I see placemaking as an inherently political and therefore highly contested practice, realised through the continuous interplay between the three dimensions of place: conceived (place as it is envisioned by its founder), perceived (place as it is interpreted by its users, media, and the wider public), and lived (social practices and relations localised in the physical space). Furthermore, this thesis has argued for a contextualised and 'sociologically imaginative' (Mills, 1959) approach to placemaking studies, not only acknowledging the historical and cultural contexts

behind specific initiatives, but also exploring the impact of placemakers' personal biographies on the projects they come up with.

With this in mind, I started the discussion on Ziferblat with a detailed overview of the history of placemaking in Russia, exploring how different forms of public place have been changing their social and cultural role over the course of centuries and who were the agents of power behind these transformations. Apart from having set the scene for the Ziferblat case study, this historical outline contributes to the wider literature in the field by addressing two research gaps. Not only was it the first attempt to discuss Russian public places within an integrative analytical framework, focusing on the history of placemaking rather than the history of a specific form of public place, but it also went beyond the Soviet period, which dominates the relevant literature, and shed light on such under-researched areas as pre-revolutionary, post-Soviet, and modern urban culture in Russia. In a nutshell, this analysis has demonstrated that the anti-cafe is the most large-scale, bottom-up and democratic project in the entire history of Russian placemaking. On the one hand, it originated from very specific historical and cultural circumstances, including long centuries of state control over public space, late (or, rather, interrupted) development of entrepreneurship, the lack of third places, and a more recent phenomenon—the 'urbanism boom' of the 2010s, bringing the issues of urban revitalisation and placemaking into public discourse and, partly intentionally, partly not, glossing over deeper political concerns of the educated class. On the other hand, this Russian initiative reflected and embodied two global urban trends—the growing impact of digital culture on social life and the increasing spatial blurring of urban functions.

This glocal nature, as well as other features of Ziferblat, was largely shaped by the personality of its founder, Ivan Mitin. I have shown how Ziferblat reflects his hybrid identity of a post-Soviet millennial, who came of age in the Third Space (Bhabha, 1994) between socialism and neoliberal capitalism. While international media tend to associate Ziferblat with stereotypic images of Soviet communal living, to Mitin this project represents his self-identification as a global citizen and digital native. At the same time, Ziferblat embodies the late-socialist sentiment of the 'Imaginary West' (Yurchak, 2005)—an idealised elsewhere, defined through its discursive opposition to the Soviet. Nevertheless, Mitin's approach to placemaking is remarkably akin to the Soviet Constructivist idea of the 'social condenser' (Ginzburg, [1927] 2017). Just like Russian avant-garde architects designed experimental housing and leisure spaces intended for the construction of 'the new Soviet man', Mitin envisioned Ziferblat as a global social experiment or, more precisely, 'social media in real life', producing sociability and community, participation, and non-hierarchy as a breeding ground for

further developments in society, economy, and politics. The class identity of the founder also had a strong, and in some respects controversial, impact on Ziferblat. On the one hand, his precarious young adult life at the fringes of the creative class in neoliberal Moscow shaped his vision of Ziferblat as an affordable and friendly space, welcoming remote workers and people seeking a quiet hideaway from the city buzz, but not limiting their user rights to a single prescribed activity, like food consumption in cafes or work in coworking spaces. On the other hand, Mitin's intelligentsia background made him pursue the socially exclusionary idea of 'culturedness' in Russian Ziferblats and affected his perplexed attitude towards the commercial side of his social experiment, which, despite its anti-capitalist spirit, has always been a business enterprise. Overall, through the analysis of Mitin's life history I have elucidated how his biography predetermined such key dialectics of Ziferblat as global/local, imaginary/real, physical/digital, social/commercial, and inclusive/exclusive.

To explore these ambiguities further and capture the scope of ambition behind Ziferblat, I chose to look at this project through the lens of Foucault's notion of heterotopia, which, I argue, has great explanatory power when it comes to experimental, alternative, imaginative places, especially those that are difficult to pigeonhole. It was the concept of 'effectively realised utopias', simultaneously representing, contesting, and inverting other already existing spaces (Foucault, [1967] 2008), that helped me unpick how the idea of Ziferblat was constructed. Although this placemaking initiative brought about a new form of public place, it was not created from scratch. Instead, it builds on a range of socio-spatial metaphors representing the reformative ethos of this project and embodied in its physical space and social practices and relations. Ziferblat was conceived as an 'other space' where homeyness meets sociability, classic forms of public place (first and foremost, cafes) are purified from the disengaging and dehumanising effects of the capitalist service economy, the cultural gap resulting from the socialist and neoliberal post-socialist ideologies and policies is closed, the limitations of functionalist urban planning are mitigated, consumption is replaced with participation, and, finally, making new social ties is as simple as friending someone on Facebook. In addition, Ziferblat was intended to be a safe haven and a liminal space, disrupting the 'time-space rhythms of capitalist development' (Lambert, 2013: 2) and celebrating freedom of individuality, self-fulfilment, thought and behaviour. However, I have identified three factors impeding the realisation of this idyll. First, despite being largely influenced by the founder's personality and orchestrated by his will, Ziferblat is a contested space that is not single-handedly constructed but rather co-constructed with other agents of placemaking—staff, customers, media, franchisees, and even landlords, each of which might conceive, perceive and live Ziferblat in their own way. Second, each space that

Ziferblat refers to carries specific power dynamics, mode of use and code of conduct; when juxtaposed in one space, these socio-spatial frameworks often contradict each other. Third, the trajectory of seclusion and liminality inevitably raises the issues of social inclusion, to which I will return in my closing remarks.

Apart from making a step towards developing a critical theory of placemaking, this thesis makes four important contributions to the debates on the changing nature of urban social life. First, it provides a critical perspective on the opportunities and challenges that have not yet been discussed in the emerging literature on the post-functionalist city. As follows from the comparative analysis of the ethnographic data collected in Russia and the UK, accompanied by a wider media research, one of the main reasons that made Ziferblat popular in the global context is the fact that it has addressed the growing demand for flexible, multifunctional public places. Whereas Di Marino and Lapintie (2017) associate the rise of the post-functionalist city with the development of ICT and flexible working cultures, the case study of Ziferblat has also highlighted the impact of the increasing geographic mobility, differentiation of lifestyles, precarity, and housing crisis. Nevertheless, as my analysis has shown, this in many regards progressive approach to placemaking inevitably creates various clashes, conflicts and misframings. In Ziferblat, most of such collisions happen at the intersection of work and leisure and at the border between the public and private realms. While the work/leisure balance is more or less well-maintained through temporal rhythms, zoning and soundscape design, the public/private dialectic (embodied, for instance, in Ziferblat's controversial sleeping etiquette) is often subject to arbitrary decisions. Moreover, my research has demonstrated that the post-functionalist approach, despite giving customers more freedom and control over how they use the space, at times makes them even less powerful than they are in more conventional public places. Extending the observation made by Jones et al. (2015) regarding how chain cafes and fast food restaurants tend to be more conducive to confident use than their quirkier, independent competitors, I argue that placemakers, designing and running multifunctional spaces, should be especially sensitive to the possible anxieties and frustrations provoked by such environments. Furthermore, as the case study of Ziferblat has illustrated, the development of the post-functionalist city might be hampered by certain legal challenges, as the projects combining different functions and frameworks under one roof often end up in a grey zone in terms of licensing.

Second, this thesis puts forward the concept of the post-digital culture—a new approach to placemaking that seeks to find the best balance between the advances of Web 2.0 and mobile technologies and the value of unmediated, face-to-face social

interaction. I have discussed how Mitin, a digital native coming from the position of cybertimism, envisioned Ziferblat as a physical embodiment of the unbounded sociability, participatory ethos, and non-hierarchy of social media. Even though this idealised vision never actually came true, Ziferblat's spatial design, accommodating all sorts of online activities but at the same time encouraging unmediated contacts between strangers, struck a chord with many people of different ages, occupations, and cultural backgrounds across the world. Linking this finding with my previous argument regarding the post-functionalist city, I argue that a post-digital approach to placemaking provides a better response to the challenges of modern urban life than, for instance, the no-wifi policy and gadget ban in public places. Further research should investigate other placemaking projects coming from the post-digital sentiment or apply this new theoretical framework to already known initiatives bridging the gap between digital technologies and the possibility of an immediate encounter in a public place (e.g., Meetup social platform; communal tables in laptop-friendly cafes).

Third, my research on the implementation of the concept of 'social media in real life' in Ziferblat contributes to the long-standing debates on the factors producing conviviality in public places and, more specifically, the way it is affected by the use of ICT. I have shown how the combination of meticulous physical design, hosts' communicative labour, and special interactive frameworks can produce great levels of sociability in a public place and how, if one of these elements fails, others can to a certain extent compensate for this loss. However, none of these factors alone is decisive, which also applies to the use of mobile devices. Not only has the case study of Ziferblat challenged the assumption that digital technologies necessarily disrupt sociability in public places, but it also has demonstrated how the use of devices often entails brief moments of cooperation between users. When enhanced by the above-mentioned constituents of Ziferblat's conviviality, such encounters easily develop into deeper interactions.

Fourth, by focusing on such ephemeral connections, this thesis contributes to the emerging research on the 'micro-geographies of encounter' (Jones et al., 2015), bringing into the foreground inattentive, unfocused forms of sociality, also called 'subtle ties' (Tjora, 2013), and looking into individual, not necessarily positive experiences, often neglected in the literature on the social role of third places. Thus, I have pointed out how Ziferblat's staff sometimes demonstrate strong normative expectations regarding what constitutes 'true', meaningful social interaction, while undervaluing the importance of 'silent community' (Dokk Holm, 2013), acknowledged by many guests. Moreover, Ziferblat's super-sociability, perceived or real, has mixed outcomes for staff and guests. Although it creates a strong sense of belonging for both sides (and,

according to some evidence, even serves as a therapeutic space), it often results in emotional burnout for the former and anxiety and frustration for the latter, thereby adding to the pressures of 'communicative capitalism' (Dean, 2009; Hill, 2015; Brophy, 2017). Nevertheless, the case study of Ziferblat has revealed the global demand of the contemporary 'society on the move' (Lash and Urry, 1994) for social spaces providing instant community experience, not based on the place of residence or common interests.

The final and, perhaps, most difficult question I set out to answer in my case study of Ziferblat interrogated the outcomes of this ambitious placemaking initiative. Aside from addressing the global need in flexible, multifunctional spaces where one can also purchase the sense of community and belonging for a price comparable to that of a cup of coffee and cake, did Ziferblat manage to foster any further developments in society, economy, and politics? By and large, the history of this project reads as an initial leap from consumption to participation and a gradual shift back. As this enterprise has been scaling up, the profit-driven logic of financial sustainability required greater quality, a more professional approach, larger venues, and, consequently, faster rhythms, while the room for participation shrank. However, the decrease of the opportunity for participation in Ziferblat also results from its cultural politics. I have elucidated how in Russian branches the perceived cultural gap, attributed to the aftermath of the (post-)Soviet period, is addressed with a paradoxical mixture of the Soviet notion of culturedness and a superficial and elitist interpretation of the creative city concept, popularised thanks to the 'urbanism boom' of the 2010s. While Moscow's Ziferblats see themselves as social condensers, intended to bring together the cultured and civilise the uncultured, in London and Manchester Ziferblat is recognised as a part of local creative industries, commodifying the ideology of inclusivity and diversity. Even though Ziferblat is positioned as an environment that is co-created with the customers, Moscow teams, acting like curators, are very unwilling to share their aesthetic power with the guests. That said, the example of Edge Street demonstrates that a profit-driven but customer-oriented approach, while threatening aesthetic diversity and authenticity, might result in a greater social diversity. Furthermore, the analysis has shown that, apart from cultural differences and the balance between the social and the commercial, levels of social inclusion and diversity in a particular branch largely depend on its location in the city. I have also discussed how the implementation of alternative economies in Ziferblat at times poses the uneasy question of whether this is really an attempt to provide an alternative to traditional capitalist forms or just picking up some 'hot trends' without much (or, conversely, with too much) consideration. Nevertheless, some guests perceive Ziferblat as a 'space of hope' (Harvey, 2000), promising the possibility of social change—not only in the economy, but also in politics.

Although in its everyday life Ziferblat tries to distance itself from the political, at moments of crisis it reveals its infra/proto/parapolitical essence. This discussion, highlighting the ambiguous and yet inspiring—or, in one word, heterotopic—nature of Ziferblat, is another accomplishment of this thesis, as it provides a multifaceted perspective on what is typically described as appropriation, commodification, and exploitation of participatory and DIY initiatives. By complementing a sociological perspective with the consumer and service research lens, this case study has shed light on the intricate relations between social aspirations and the logic of commercial sustainability in placemaking.

In addition to the above-listed theoretical and practical contributions, this thesis has illuminated some methodological aspects of doing global ethnography in the mediated world. Drawing on the concepts of blended and remote ethnography (Dyke, 2013; Postill, 2017) and my own findings, I argue that contemporary third places, permeated with online connections and engaged in social media marketing practices, require a post-digital ethnographic approach, not only bringing online representations into focus but also linking them with the offline contexts behind and around them. My research also contributes to the emerging discussion on the issues of researcher's attachment in third place studies (Tjora, 2013) by pointing out that such notions as 'immersion' and 'being there' should be reconceptualised in the context of global and post-digital ethnography.

While I was putting the finishing touches to this thesis, the object of my study has faced a number of challenges. Pokrovka, the mother of all anti-cafes and the most purist Ziferblat, after a long struggle with financial difficulties made a decision to withdraw from the non-hierarchy management system, allow alcohol consumption, reduce leisure activities, and reframe into a coworking space with occasional cultural events. Despite these efforts, in August 2018 this Ziferblat was evicted from its original venue for failing to pay rent on time. A new location, however, was found in no time, and the queue on the opening day took up the entire street. The ZUKI team experienced similar issues with their two Liverpool branches—both were forced out by their landlords for an undisclosed reason. In their comments to the press, Ziferblat representatives raised the issue of property owners favouring chain operators over independent businesses and announced plans to find alternative locations in Liverpool. The only Slovenian branch in Ljubljana also closed in 2018; the reasons have never been discussed in media. It remains to be seen how Ziferblat will deal with this crisis, but such situations remind us that small-scale projects, born out of the desire to offer solutions to systemic issues of neoliberal capitalism, are themselves very vulnerable to the problem they are trying to fight.

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Appendix A. List of participants

Table 2. Staff participants

VENUE	PARTICIPANT	STATUS
Pokrovka	Nikita	Host
	Tanya	Host
	Indira Alymkulova	Ziferblat Worldwide CEO
	Gleb	Ziferblat Worldwide CTO
Tverskaya	Maya	Branch manager
	Boris	Host
Old Street	Evan	Host
	Francesca	Host
	Sara	Host
	Kevin	Host
	Alex	Branch manager
Edge Street	Gareth Harold	ZUKI COO
	Ben Davis	ZUKI CMO
	Tracey	Branch manager
	Henry	Host
	Brenda	Host
NON-ZIFERBLAT ANTI-CAFE	Oleg Voronov	Owner

Table 3. Guest participants

ZIFERBLAT BRANCH	PARTICIPANT	STATUS	AGE	OCCUPATION
Pokrovka	Natalia	Newcomer	42	Student
	Zoya	Newcomer	29	Teacher
	Marina	Regular	39	Counsellor
	Rita	Ziferblat volunteer	16	Student
	Pyotr and Roman	Regulars	18 and 20	Students
	Artem	Local	20	Courier/writer
	Yastrebov	Regular	35	Entrepreneur

Tverskaya	Nina	N/R ²⁶⁰	17	Student
	Marta and Kirill	N/R and newcomer	16 and 16	Students
	Lena, Zhenya and Masha	N/R	24, 32 and 30	Manager, lawyer and designer
	Lida and Varya	N/R and newcomer	26 and 23	Photographer and graphic designer
	Galya	Ziferblat volunteer	19	Student
	Mila and Lada	Newcomers	19 and 23	Students
	Viktor	Regular	25	IT specialist
	Megrab	Regular	25	Student
	Suren	Local	28	Musician
	Milena	Newcomer	25	Artist
Old Street	Anya and Nonna	Newcomers	33 and 42	Volunteer/artist and care worker
	Vincent	N/R	49	Charity worker
	Naomi	Host	34	Graphic designer
	Magda	Newcomer	72	Writer/translator
	Quinn	N/R	23	Student
	Hattie	Ziferblat volunteer	21	Student
	Bryan and Heather	Regulars	27 and 22	Writer/musician and chef
Edge Street	Tammie	Newcomer	55	Unemployed
	Kyle	N/R	25	Engineer
	Danielle	N/R	27	Media worker
	Byron	N/R	25	Musician
	Iris	Newcomer	31	Teacher
	Susanne	N/R	29	Project manager
	Harper	N/R	34	Business consultant
	Ted and Kara	Newcomers	19 and 19	Students

²⁶⁰ Newcomer-to-regular: a person who recently discovered Ziferblat and is becoming a regular or visits it occasionally but steadily.

Appendix B. Interview questions

Staff interview guide

This is a more or less standard list of questions that I normally used in all branches. On top of that, I asked more specific questions depending on the site (e.g. playlist arrangements) and participant's status (i.e. host or manager, or manager who takes shifts), sometimes sharing and discussing my earlier observations with staff.

- How did you start working in Ziferblat?
- Can you remember the first time you heard about Ziferblat/your first visit?
- When you talk to someone who has never heard about Ziferblat, how do you usually explain what kind of place it is? Do people grasp the idea of Ziferblat easily?
- Are there any other places in Moscow/London/Manchester that you find somewhat similar to Ziferblat?
- It's often said that Ziferblat is a social media in real life—something like Facebook, as it's easy to make friends here, but better than Facebook, as it's real life. Is it really that easy for newcomers to make friends here? How does it usually happen? Do you do anything special to facilitate interactions?
- What are the rules in Ziferblat? Do people ever try to violate them? How do you deal with that?
- What is the event policy in (this) Ziferblat? To what kind of event you would say 'no'?
- What kind of people go to Ziferblat? What kind of people or what kind of behaviour would you not like to see here? What is your ideal guest?
- Is there anything similar about the team members? If someone new wanted to become a member of the team, how would you figure out whether they are going to fit or not? What do you like most about your job and what is the worst part of it?
- Have you ever been to other Ziferblats?
- How has (this) Ziferblat changed since the opening? What are the key goals and challenges of Ziferblat at the moment?
- If you had only five words to describe Ziferblat, what words would it be?

Guest interview guide

This is, again, only a core set of questions. Depending on guest's time availability and feelings about Ziferblat, interviews ranged from brief to more elaborate; the order and phrasing of questions was flexible. In Moscow interviews, guests typically discussed their thoughts about other anti-cafes in comparison to Ziferblat.

- Is it/Do you remember your first time in Ziferblat? How did you find out about this place? Did it turn out as you expected?
- How do you use this place today/usually?
- How would you describe Ziferblat to someone who has never been here?
- Would you say it is different from other public places, like cafes?
- Are there any other places in Moscow/London/Manchester that you find somewhat similar to Ziferblat?
- What kind of people do you think are visiting this place? Can you think of a person that would not feel comfortable here?
- Would you say it is easy to make friends here?

Appendix C. The mission of anti-cafes: a non-Ziferblat perspective

What follows below is an excerpt from a TV interview with the founders of an anti-cafe in Komsomolsk-na-Amure, a small city with 250,977 inhabitants, 8700 km from Moscow (distance longer than from London to San Francisco). The founders looked worlds apart from Mitin in terms of class and aesthetic, their speech was quite poor and sometimes incoherent, the cultural program of their anti-cafe would definitely be criticised by Mitin as 'meaningless amusements' and 'unsophisticated leisure', but they sounded very passionate about their mission:

We just wanted (...) to demonstrate to everyone that you can have leisure without alcohol. There are some people gathering—like, groups of ten—for some intellectual cinema parties with discussions. (...) Everything is so fragmented. We're just trying to put it all together and unite all these people. I really hope that someday people will have the opportunity of good intellectual leisure, not related to alcohol, to drugs, just good decent leisure, healthy leisure, not only for the youth, but also for people who already have families, older than 30 and 40, that would be really nice. (...) Anti-cafes can unite people (...) who want to spend quality time, not to sit on a bench with their friends.²⁶¹ The very presence of an anti-cafe in the city gives people a choice, whether to go to a bar or to visit our place, and many of them are dropping by already, they spend time without alcohol here—alcohol is a huge problem!—and without all other bad stuff. (YungradTV, 2012)

²⁶¹ 'Sitting on a bench' is a very common stereotypic attribute of the low-quality leisure culture available for youth in post-soviet Russian cities; another one, also very frequent, is 'hanging out in a porch' (of the apartment block).

Appendix D. Food etiquette in Treehouse

The following text is comprised of one longer (Users 1-6) and two shorter (User 7 and User 8) discussions that occurred in Treehouse's V Kontakte group in 2010–2011.

- Treehouse: Ban mode on. From now on, it is forbidden under penalty of death to consume such drugs as Red Bull and other energy drinks, instant noodles and suchlike crap in Treehouse.
- User 1: Looks like even breathing in Treehouse is going to be restricted soon.
- User 2: Not very friendly.
- User 3: Noodles stink,²⁶² screw this shit. And Red Bull goes in cans, which already feels like bydlo. I totally agree, rid us of aluminium and stink.
- User 2: Don't you think that it's a bit arrogant to reject someone just because they eat noodles or something like that? I agree that energy drinks are awful, one can drink them only when working under a deadline. But it's impossible to cook anything in your place, we're supposed to drink tea and eat sweets only. You guys are against all these expensive cafes, but you force us to go there to grab a meal after, say, a film night in your place.
- Mitin: Buy some eggs and make an omelet. Cook some rice. Fry a chicken. All these things are being done in our place on a daily basis. After all, it's not a restaurant or somebody's flat. It is not food that brings people here. As for noodles, it's ridiculous and vulgar. And so is Red Bull.
- User 2: Bringing your own eggs, raw chicken or rice with you when you are coming here for an event – this is what is really ridiculous... instead of having instant noodles for a quick bite, which is not more unhealthy than your sweets and crackers. There's been too many restrictions lately. You guys²⁶³ could just cook for everyone, and those who eat would just donate some extra money. You've just said it's possible to cook some decent food in this place. Or maybe you guys should invite only the people of

²⁶² Translation note: here and elsewhere in this discussion, the word 'stink' is used in its formal sense ('unpleasant odour').

²⁶³ Meaning Mitin and his clique.

your class to your place. What is the point of Treehouse if you don't want to engage with the people who eat something that you don't like? Kicking them out for this petty reason—so stupid.

User 4: Not stupid at all.

User 2: If you guys can't stand this odour, there are many ways to get rid of it, it's not necessary to kick everyone out.

User 5: That's not the point. The thing is, places like Treehouse need a special atmosphere, and those who hold this space have their right to create whatever atmosphere they want to create. If you like an atmosphere of a messy dorm, go ahead. But this is first and foremost a HOUSE, and in a HOUSE, there should be home-cooked food and homely odours. I hate the beer odour, and I avoid such places where people drink beer. If I liked sunflower seeds, I would not eat them in a theatre. There is a place for everything. Restrictions are necessary. For your own freedom, if you like.

User 6: Yes, and energy drinks smell terrible. And so do noodles. Ivan, do command, your game—your rules. Those who don't like it can go to McDonald's.

User 7: I wonder if drinking pop would be mauvais ton?

Mitin: Red Bull is mauvais ton, pop is on the verge but still acceptable.

User 8: I don't drink energy drinks but damn it, what is so bad about them? Nobody's going to pour it over others, they'll just sit quietly and drink it from their own can, no?

Mitin: Energy drinks smell bad, they kill the atmosphere.

Appendix E. Filtering donations in Treehouse

The following text is comprised of two discussions (Users 1–3 and Users 4–6) that occurred in Treehouse’s V Kontakte group in February and August 2011.

- User 1: Does the House [abbreviation for ‘The Treehouse’ – A.K.] need books and Twister?
- User 2: I guess everyone would be happy if you bring them.
- Mitin: Depends on what kind of books. I’m not a fan of Twister but if there will be at least 10 votes in favour, then ok.
- User 1: Classic mostly. Shakespeare, Chekhov, Balmont,²⁶⁴ Karamzin,²⁶⁵ stuff like that.
- Mitin: Such books are very much welcome.
- Mitin: You can vote against Twister here [by clicking ‘like’ button under that comment – A.K.]. I vote against. To vote in favour, see below.
- User 3: Against. Stupid, noisy game.
- User 4: Is there a Twister at all, guys? I’ve been trying to find it among other games but still no luck. If not, let’s find out who can bring one.
- User 5 (a regular): No, don’t bring it, it’s gonna kill the atmosphere.
- User 6: It just doesn’t fit, by *all* [emphasis added – A.K.] parameters.
- User 5: Exactly.

²⁶⁴ Russian modernist poet (1867–1942).

²⁶⁵ Russian historian (1776–1826).

Appendix F. Uma2rman incident in Pokrovka

This discussion occurred in one of Pokrovka social media groups (2012)

User 1: Can someone explain me the rules regarding playing music in this place? Today I was approached by some girl who asked me – in a very rude manner – not to sing in Russian because it doesn't comply with 'Ziferblat's playlist'. What the hell? Not that I am resentful but, obviously, I'm never coming back again.

Dina Yablonskaya: Hello, it was me who asked you not to play Uma2rman.²⁶⁶ Music creates the atmosphere in Ziferblat, no less than people and hand-picked interior pieces. That is why we are so vigilant about what people are playing in our place. And that was not about the language.

User 1: It wasn't my first time in Ziferblat. And it wasn't the first time I played in Ziferblat. As for this specific song, I played it twice – I guess, you were not around when I did it first time, because everybody liked it. Someone even asked me to play more Uma2rman. <...> As we know, Ziferblat positions itself as a space of freedom. I completely agree with the alcohol and smoking restrictions – they really can ruin the atmosphere of the cafe. But restricting the music that people play? Ok, it would make sense if I played Korol I Shut²⁶⁷ or something with obscene language...

User 2: +1

Dina Yablonskaya: [posted a 'Jackie Chan WTF meme' picture]

User 2: Dina, how comes there is less freedom in a space of freedom than in Egypt before the revolution?

²⁶⁶ Russian pop rock band that used to be very popular in 2004–2005.

²⁶⁷ Russian horror punk band.

Appendix G. Tverskaya Manifesto

These rules were retrieved from the Tverskaya website, cached by Google on 20 March 2015. I also saw these rules posted on the wall during my brief visit to Tverskaya in September 2015. By the time of my 2016-2017 fieldwork in this branch, paragraph 19 had lost its relevance as Tverskaya started offering rooms and tables for reservation.

1. Ziferblat aims to be a place where you can always come in, as if it was your friend's home.
2. We are open seven days a week, from 11:00 till 0:00.
3. We hold lots of events—follow us on V Kontakte and Facebook or have a look at the posters above the counter.
4. Alcohol is prohibited in all forms. You should also refrain from drinking before you visit us. No canned energy drinks are allowed here.
5. We have an amazing high-speed wifi. Connect to the network named 'Ziferblat' with the password 'pushkinpushkin', and use it as you please.
6. We sincerely ask you to memorise the hosts' names to avoid addressing them as 'mister' or 'miss'.²⁶⁸ Please love and respect them as if it was that friend who invited you to their home.
7. Smoking is not allowed, even on the balcony. In principle, we are tolerant to smokers, but we would like Ziferblat to smell of delicious coffee and fresh sweets.
8. We are always open to those willing to organise an event here. If you are interested, contact our hosts or managers.
9. Since we are trying to keep this place quiet and cosy, we sincerely ask you to keep the noise to a minimum. That doesn't mean that you have to whisper or refrain from talking, it's rather about large groups laughing loudly, singing loudly, and loud and perhaps at times inappropriate playing the instruments. We want each and every guest to feel comfortable here.
10. About music: you can play the instruments if you want; we are happy to turn off the music if someone is playing the piano or guitar. However, we would like to ask you to surprise us with the quality of your skills and repertoire rather than recently

²⁶⁸ Translation note: words 'mister' and 'miss' are English analogues of the typical appellatives *molodoi chelovek* ('young man') and *devushka* ('girl'), used in Russian service sector when a customer addresses a staff member or the other way around. The inappropriateness of these terms has been debated by linguists for many years, but the only one more polite alternative they came up with is to omit address terms at all, e.g., 'Would you please...'.

learned pop hits.

11. If you have a band, choir or a small orchestra or you are a unique one-man band with an original repertoire, please contact us ASAP.
12. Closing doors is something from another universe. There is only one place in Ziferblat where the door can be closed—our lecture room.
13. Guests do not swear in the venue.
14. We are happy for those who are in love, but we sincerely ask them to keep their passion under reasonable control. Most of our guests, according to our little survey, feel very uncomfortable when they are exposed to someone's passionate kissing and cuddling.
15. Ecology matters to us. We are trying to be environmentally responsible and engage in recycling, and we invite you to do the same. Feel free to bring your batteries here, we will take care of them.
16. You can bring your own food and drinks, feel free to ask for our help with heating. We offer continental breakfast every day till 15:00. Instant noodles and other junk food is not welcome here, as their odours create an atmosphere of a messy dormitory rather than a friend's apartment.
17. For those guests who bring their kids, a highchair is available on demand. Please keep an eye on your babies—our mezzanine floor might be dangerous for little explorers.
18. Make sure you have a look at our amazing and unique second-hand clothing shop on the mezzanine floor. If you have an item that fits our aesthetic requirements, you can bring it here and exchange it for an equivalent that you like.
19. Our tables, zones and rooms are not available for reservations. As a matter of courtesy, large groups are expected to call prior to their visit to enquire whether there are any seats available.
20. We provide art supplies—paper, paintbrushes, sharpies, pencils, and paints. We welcome creativity, so feel free to share your artwork with others, e.g., by hanging it on the wall in the reading room.
21. You are not allowed to move the furniture around and switch the lights on and off. Furniture arrangement and lighting is an element of our concept, just like great coffee and free sweets. Besides, most of our furniture is older than us and our guests, so it requires a special treatment. If you need some extra space for you friend or belongings, please ask our hosts, they are happy to help.

22. We appreciate gifts from our guests, especially if those are some pretty interior accessories, fresh flowers or potted plants, good books or some food to share with other guests.
23. Coats and other outdoor clothes must be kept in our wardrobes. We like those guests who do so without our reminders.
24. We have an amazing collection of board games, from chess to Dixit. We don't have Mafia—yes, we don't like this game because of the noise and hustle that it usually causes.
25. In the cold Moscow's winter, Ziferblat sometimes feels like a tropic island. If you feel too warm, please don't hesitate to open the window, but first discuss it with the people around you.
26. To keep our place clean and pretty, we ask guests to bring their dishes to the kitchen.
27. We are always happy to listen to your favourite poems, and we will reward you with free minutes for declaiming them.
28. You, our guests, are one of the most important parts of our atmosphere, so in order to help us make our large beautiful home even more comfortable, cosy and happy, please share your ideas and suggestions in our notebook.